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Welcome to RETRO

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It's hard to believe that it has been over 40 years since *Pong* was created. Though it was by no means the first ever game, it was the first successful arcade game and one that many credit with popularising the medium. The industry is a completely different beast now, but we still enjoy looking back at the evolution of our favourite games and seeing how we got to this point. In this book, we take a look at some of the games that changed the way we play, from *Knights Of The Old Republic* to *GoldenEye 007*. We'll also take an in-depth look at how some games came to be, including *God Of War*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *Wip3out*. You'll also find interviews with some of the industry's leading lights, as the likes of Kenji Kanno, Jane Jensen and David Darling share their thoughts on their work and its legacy. Throw in the likes of *Tomb Raider, Gradius, Final Fantasy* and *Gran Turismo* and there's something here for every gamer to enjoy.

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> CONTENTS...

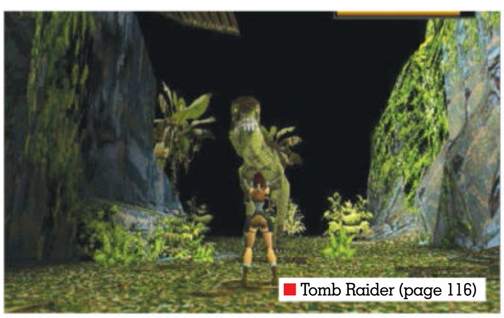

40

BEHIND THE SCENES

The world's greatest developers tell their story about the making of your favourite games

THE RETRO GUIDE TO...

Ultimate in-depth guides to your retro favourites


Tomb Raider (page 116)

FEATURE ARTICLES

Fascinating stories from the world of retro gaming

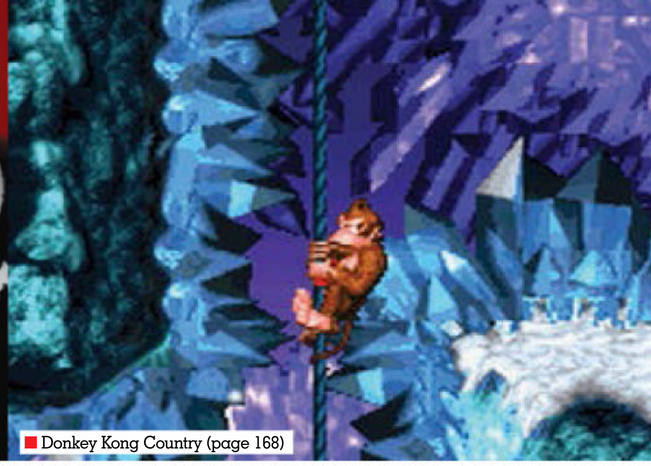
GAME CHANGERS

The titles that changed the landscape of gaming forever


Blizzard (page 110)



GoldenEye 007 (page 138)



Donkey Kong Country (page 168)



Gran Turismo (page 92)

WHY I LOVE...

Those in the industry share their favourite games

BEST BOSS

Gaming's greatest battles blown up to epic proportions

BEST INTRO

Gaming's ground-breaking intros bring the nostalgia

INTERVIEW

Industry legends talk their greatest work



Final Fantasy (page 82)



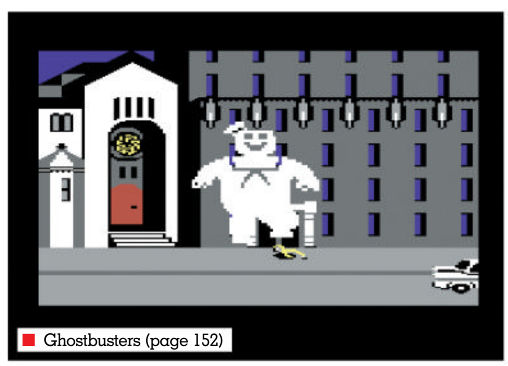
Kenji Kanno (page 024)



Treasure Hunter G (page 034)



Sonic (page 108)



Ghostbusters (page 152)

DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro on our dedicated forum **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum**



BEHIND THE SCENES

GOD OF WAR

Who would you get behind? An orange marsupial, a hovering space car, or a furious half-naked demigod with chains grafted to his wrists? God Of War director David Jaffe reveals how Kratos was a really angry blessing for PlayStation 2…

MASCOTS COME IN all shapes and sizes. If there were some perfect creation process, chances are the most successful gaming heroes of all time wouldn't be an out-of-shape plumber and a hedgehog that isn't even the right colour. No, there's no science to it all, hence why we probably shouldn't be all that surprised that Sony's unexpected mascot for the PS2 era came in the form of gaming's angriest man. The last great example of a platform holder giving one of its studios almost full creative control over a project could easily have gone so badly wrong, but the history books tell us otherwise – *God Of War* managed to make ancient history exciting for a whole new audience, just as *Clash Of The Titans* had done nearly 25 years earlier, with cutting edge technology once again at the forefront of bringing legends back to life and capturing the imaginations of a generation. .

Strange to think, then, that *God Of War* might never have existed had one of the other options on the table at the time been given the green light first. Founding father of the franchise, game director and personable semi-automatic cuss rifle David Jaffe talks us through some of the other options and, with all due respect, it isn't hard to see why Kratos came out on top. "I was looking at a game – we were calling it *Dead Man* at the time – and it was an open-world first-person game," he reveals. "It wasn't exactly survival horror – it wasn't so slow-paced – but it was trying to do like an action-adventure set in the Louisiana swamps and bayou about voodoo and supernatural powers, so the character would have these abilities and powers. I liked the idea of doing an open-world, first-person game and there hadn't been a lot of those at the time." Given that *Shadow Man* never exactly took off to the degree Acclaim would have hoped and the technical limitations of PS2, we can't say we're entirely surprised to hear that a game we only just heard about was cancelled a decade ago.

"Another one that didn't get as far came from us talking a lot about trying to create a way for gameplay to evoke the same kind of emotions as watching *Lupin III*, the one that Miyazaki did," Jaffe continues. "How could we make a game that puts you in that same kind of feeling of high adventure?" The spirit of this project seemed to make it into the final game, even if the original pitch never really got off the ground. Indeed, there was always a clear front-runner for some of the team, it would appear, and Jaffe confirms as much. "Those were competing for the longest time but then I think it was ultimately was Ken Feldman, who was the art director on all of them, who said that out of all of the ideas, it was the *God Of War* universe that we'd best be able to realise in a really spectacular way. That was when we finally said 'Fuck it, let's go with this one'."

Hell, it wasn't even *God Of War* back then. "After *Twisted Metal Black* shipped, we spent probably four or five months iterating about four ideas – talking to the team, seeing what they would be into, fleshing out some of the concepts to see which one had the greatest potential. From that, ultimately *Dark Odyssey* – which became *God Of War* – won out, kicking off with the high concept of 'What if Paul Verhoeven had directed *Clash Of The Titans*?' but we changed that to 'What if Ridley Scott had directed *Clash Of The Titans*?' for the second document because nobody knew who Paul Verhoeven was."

Lack of cinema knowledge on the production team's end aside, it seems as though Jaffe and his team had prepared concepts for *God Of War* that differed radically from that original seed. "I still have a document showing the very adult, edgy and violent version of what this game could be, which is obviously what it became, but also all the way down to sort of Disney's *Hercules*… maybe we'd do something that was a little more *Mario*," he tells us. "We originally started out with the idea of doing first-person melee, so *God Of War* was originally going to be first-person. It didn't get very far – we talked to some of the programmers about it and did a lot of research. Dreamcast had a game out at the time that was kind of the best in breed for first-person melee, called *Maken X*. We studied that a lot trying to figure out if we



Released: July 2005
Format: PlayStation 2
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Sony Santa Monica
Shannon Studstill, producer
Tim Moss, lead programmer
Ken Feldman, lead artist



Unique combat moves while hanging and climbing made Kratos feel all-powerful. There's no situation in which you're left without a way in which to ruin someone's day.

DELETED SCENES

David Jaffe on the sequences that didn't quite make the cut



THE LIFT

"We built a wonderful level which you can see on some of the behind-the-scenes materials – an elevator through the desert level. With that elevator level, we couldn't figure out how to get the sand to trap the elevator, so we had to table that."

THE WINGS

"We had the Icarus wings in the first game too and even though I think they look beautiful in the third game, I liked the way we were talking about using them in our game. It was more of a Joust mechanic, more about full three-dimensional exploring, combat and flying and less about that kind of tunnel where you're just dodging obstacles. But that's one fucking beautiful tunnel in *God Of War III*."

THE LABYRINTH

"Tobin designed a level that I ended up ripping off for *Twisted Metal* [2012]. It was a maze that started with Kratos in this big open environment, with the walls coming up and down in real-time and changing the level layout. So it was about being in this space that was constantly changing and having to adjust. So we ended up using that for the arena level in Twisted Metal on PS3, but I regret that not going because that was such a cool idea."



Brutal finishing moves were the perfect way to end any encounter, especially considering the extra rewards in the form of Orbs. Man, that Kratos really loves his Orbs…

could make it work. And *GTA III* had just come out, so we were kicking around the idea of open world. So yeah, it really was a very broad initial conceptual phase while we were looking at this idea and a couple of others, and it just sort of evolved into *God Of War* through a great deal of combat and fighting and yelling at each other."

Even though Jaffe is clearly talking about the design process there, he's done an equally good job of describing the game the team ended up making – loud, brash and with precious few pulled punches. That said, the game's violent streak was all kinds of intentional and for a number of reasons. "As a kid I'd seen and read family-friendly Greek mythology, but I was reading Edith Hamilton to research a lot of this stuff before we went into development and the stories themselves can be easily read to be very gruesome and violent. It was definitely a good fit," explains Jaffe. "It wasn't like we were saying we wanted to do an ultra-violent Lego game – it was more about taking that mythology and playing up the angle that it was really violent, which seems to be something our audience really responds to. It was just having the awareness to spot that match and allow us a better shot at retail."

HOLD UP A SECOND – did the games industry's resident swear grenade just cough up some retail jargon? Fear not, the decision to make *God Of War* a bloody rampage wasn't entirely written in dollar signs – it was as much a creative decision as it was a commercial one. "I like violent stuff," Jaffe reveals, to the surprise of literally nobody who has ever played a game the man has worked on. "That's why I said Paul Verhoeven in the original pitch – I like that fun, over-the-top, acrobatic violence in movies and games. But I remember being very clear about the fact that we'd have to make sure that this was brutal and intense because if we didn't add that layer, it would look like you were just a dude running around in a helmet and a toga."

And perhaps that's why this cultural vein hadn't really been tapped at all during gaming's difficult teenage years – good as the source material may have been, nobody could find that angle to make it exciting and fresh. That takes passion, which Jaffe clearly has in spades. He has a deep-seated love for the subject matter and, as evidenced by the best historical shooters, wartime RTS games and even football management titles, sometimes that's enough of a spark to light up a classic. "Greek mythology



Sony Santa Monica got more out of the PS2 than pretty much any of its peers.



There aren't a huge amount of bosses in the original game but regular enemies make up for this shortfall by often being huge.

WHAT THEY SAID…



God Of War manages to keep the pace slick, the settings beautiful, the action fresh and the body count high

NowGamer, 2005

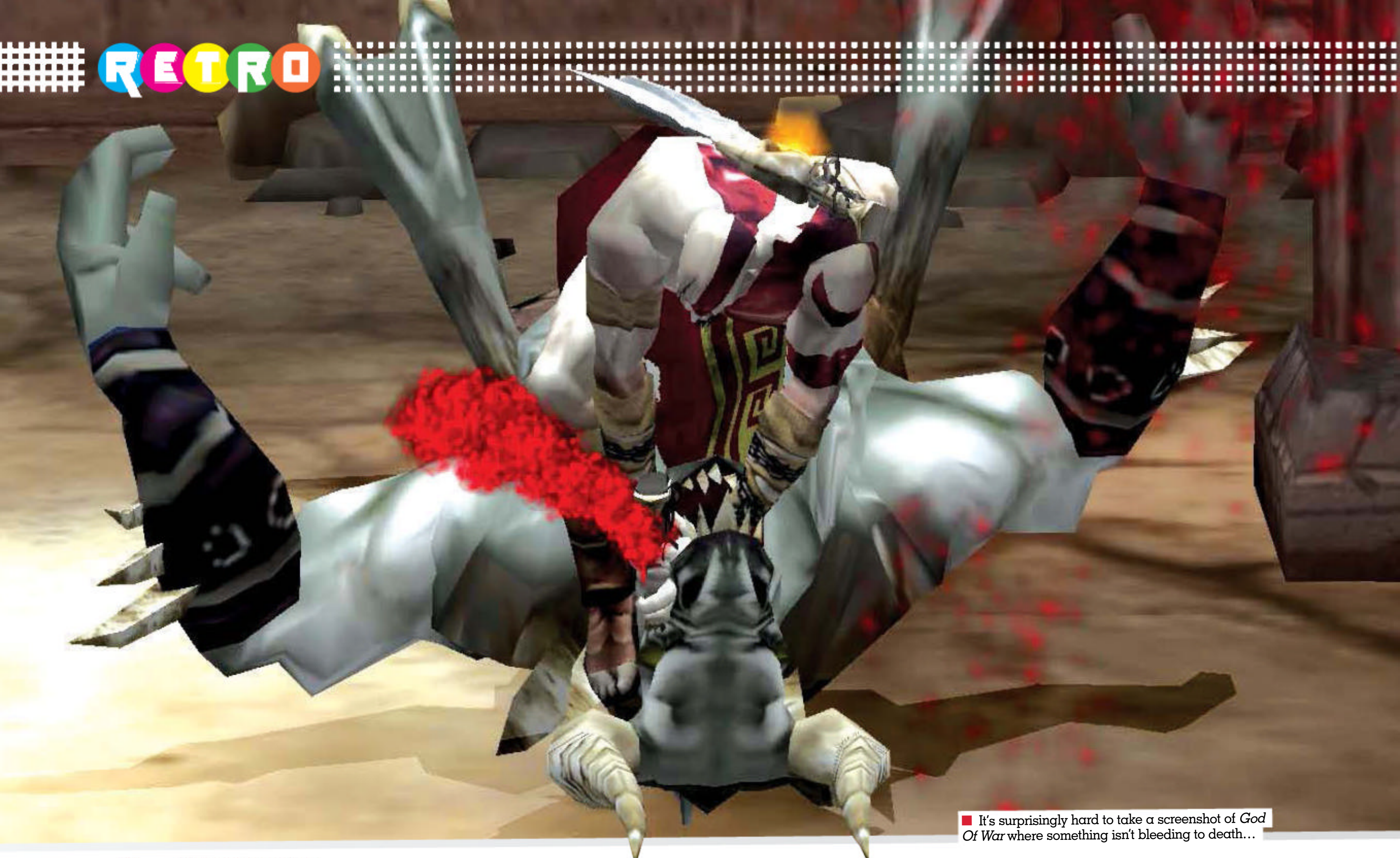
has been something that I've loved since I was in like fourth grade," he shares. "*Clash Of The Titans* was an extremely flawed, wonderful movie – when you're ten years old and watching it, it's just, like… wow. That was the summer of '81 when *Clash Of The Titans* came out, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* had come out, and when you look at *God Of War*, there's clearly a great deal of influence from both of those films. It's like superheroes – it's totally ready to go for videogame creation, with all these amazing powers, monsters, abilities and locations. And very few people had trodden that territory at that time."

Since nobody had done a proper mythological adventure in quite some time, it stands to reason that another would be announced while Sony Santa Monica's baby was still in the womb. "I remember once, we were waist-deep in development of *God Of War* and we saw a story online about a game… what the fuck was that game called? It came and it went and it got horrible reviews but to see it and to see their concept art and to read their PR, we just thought we were gonna be so fucking dead," recalls Jaffe. "They beat us to the punch, those sons of bitches!" Fortunately for Sony, this is the games industry, and not every title has the heavyweight credentials or the vision to turn a great concept into a great game, and Jaffe tells us about the moment the competition stopped… well, competing. "We saw it at E3 and breathed a sigh of relief – it wasn't all that great, not to be disrespectful to the people who made it but clearly they were hampered by budget issues."

WHETHER HE'S TALKING about *Rygar* or *Shadow Of Rome* or any number of the nine million other PS2 games we've forgotten is kind of irrelevant – it's a classic scenario that we see to this day (albeit to a lesser extent, now that budgets on triple-A games have gone daft) where lesser publishers and developers will sniff out popular themes for upcoming hits and try to outrun them. We can count on one hand the number of times it has really worked out, so maybe the budget hike has actually helped out in that regard. But even so, how was it that *God Of War* stumbled upon this content goldmine that every other game just strolled past on the way to work each day?

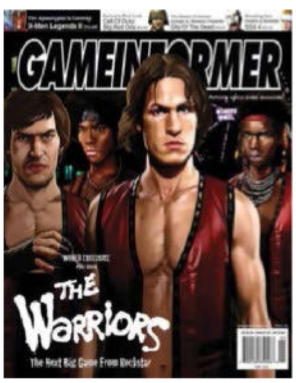
I WAS HEAVILY INFLUENCED – AND I'M SURE I'M NOT ALONE – BY RAY HARRYHAUSEN AND HIS WORK

"I guess it has to do with influences, right?," reasons Jaffe. "I was heavily influenced – and I'm sure I'm not alone – by Ray Harryhausen and his work. That was always something that appealed to me and



It's surprisingly hard to take a screenshot of *God Of War* where something isn't bleeding to death…

WHAT THEY SAID…



Difficult to resist the urge to simply genuflect and be humbled to be in the presence of such digital divinity

Game Informer, Issue 145 May 2005

something I wanted to play with. It was around the time that we were doing *God Of War* that we were starting to see a shift towards budgets going up pretty significantly. There was that time too when PSone was still out towards the beginning of PS2 and development was still inexpensive enough that you would see all these different games, things like *Second Sight* and *Psi-Ops* – there was this game on PSone, *Tale Of The Sun* or something, about a fucking caveman! – which are the kinds of subjects that are now more the world of indies, because they're affordable and you can take those kinds of chances. We came at the end of that, when most games had started having to play safe, whether it was military shooters or, at the time, crime sims like *GTA*. But Sony being Sony was always so great about letting their developers explore things that aren't just marketing-sanctioned safe genres and we were still allowed to play in those waters."

Today's market, of course, is somewhat different. Big name studios and publishers have shut up shop and others have tightened purse-strings, while unrealistic goals have seen successful games be judged otherwise. "I think it'd be really hard and expensive to compete today purely on spectacle," Jaffe nods. "But what's cool is that there are elements of *God Of War* that have nothing to do with the spectacle – level design, story, characters – that you can do with two or three people with a copy of *Unity* or *Game Maker Pro*. That's phenomenal and in that way, the market is wonderful today. But I think if you're talking about building a game where the total reason for it to exist is spectacular setpieces… it's still doable for sure but you have to have a *lot* of fucking money. That was the reason I went away after that game and moved onto more mechanics-based titles. You're only as good as your tech on that day. I want our games to stand up even after the visuals aren't as hot as they once were, where the core mechanics are something you could come back to ten years later and say 'Okay, it's really rough but fuck, it's still really fun'. I don't think I've achieved that yet but working with that game showed me that for me, that was sort of the North Star to follow. If you just chase the spectacle, the applause you get for it is pretty fucking cheap."

I WANT OUR GAMES TO STAND UP TEN YEARS LATER

SPECTACLE MUST HAVE been fairly high on the agenda in creating *God Of War*, mind. But were there any examples of tech not being able to match concept? "The game was so scripted that there wasn't a lot," Jaffe muses. "When we asked for something and they said they couldn't do it, usually that was coming from production rather than tech." One issue, though, would have given Digital Foundry a collective heart attack. "There was the giant crusher at the bottom of Pandora's temple and [the guys] just kept throwing enemies in until it dropped to like 12fps. But we all thought it was fucking awesome – we didn't care that it was 12fps 'cause the idea was so cool and it still worked. But then Tim came over and you'd have



> A GAMING EVOLUTION Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver > God Of War > Bayonetta



Raziel's starring role was a game about spectacle and a journey, two areas on which Jaffe and his team spent a lot of time.



Witches, angels, swearing and a bit of the old ultra-violence… Platinum's hardcore action game takes it to the next level.



thought that his head was about to explode. We fought about frame rate. I care about frame rate only when it hampers the game. So we fought about that, but there was one fight I did lose. I just couldn't convince Tim and Mike and even to this day I'm like 'What the fuck?' – I think he must have made a deal with the devil saying 'I will make you a great programmer but you must never use translucency in any game' or something. I kept saying that we had to have the environment go semi-transparent or we'd have to pull the camera too far back, and we wanted to keep the camera close so it was more dramatic. Almost every other game out there was making the characters and/or the environment go semi-transparent, but you'd have thought I was asking him to go assassinate his parents or something. It was not going to be done on his motherfucking watch. It was fucking bad and even to this day, you can tell I'm still a little annoyed by it, because we could have had some amazing cinematic moments in that game if it weren't for the fact that the goddamn engine didn't support translucency."



Sure, Kratos can use different weapons, but the Blades Of Chaos are always most satisfying.

For all that it may seem like *God Of War* might today be a case of style over substance – especially with so many unlikely usurpers in the likes of *Revengeance*, *Bayonetta* and *DmC* strutting their hardcore action stuff – that absolutely wasn't the case with the original. Jaffe reflects on meetings of minds where gameplay had to come first. "The guys at Santa Monica are some of the best of the best when it comes to programming. And whenever I asked for something or heard a great idea from the team, most of the time a month later it was in the game. They were a pretty impressive group to work with." Have the special effects guys kill the rainbows and the twinkly music, though – this is Jaffe we're talking to, not Bono. "But they were a pain in the ass to work with, and I'm sure they'd say the



Petrified? Worry not – escaping is as easy as waggling an analog stick.



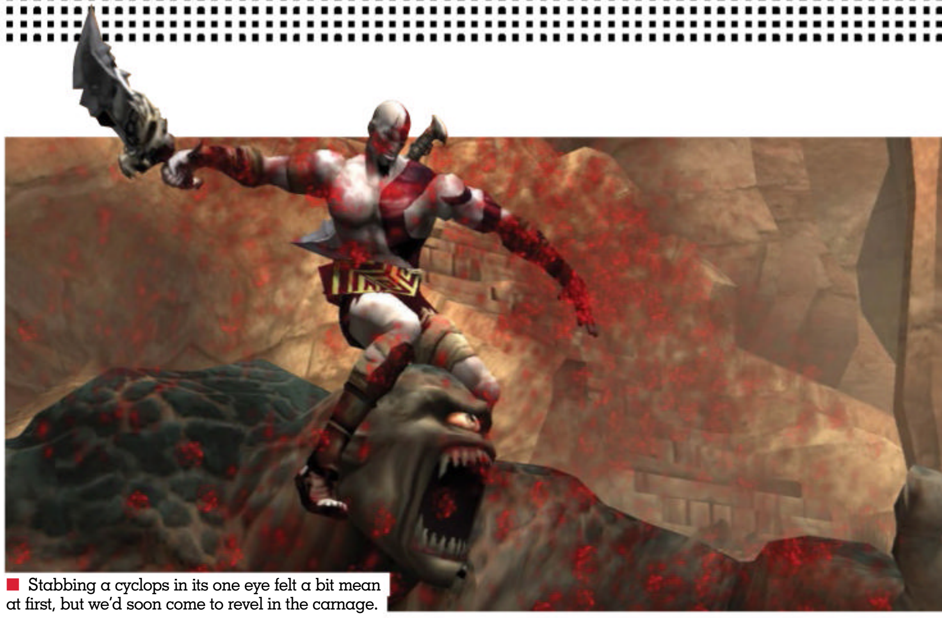




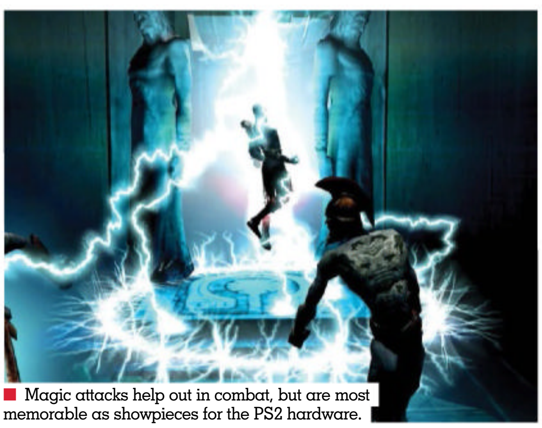
As much as we dig God Of War's concept art, we'd love to see the Disney-style mock-ups that Jaffe mentions.

same about me," he admits. "Tim and I really didn't get along very well. Me being American and him being British, him being a programmer and me being more of a high-level designer… just one against the other, even just culturally, that can sometimes be enough to break the camel's back. But when you've got cultural *and* discipline differences and you put those people on a project for three years together? I'd work with Tim again, I don't know if he'd work with me but I respect him greatly as a programmer. We got along fine outside of it. But as colleagues, I fucking wanted to blow his head off every single day and I think he probably wanted to do the same thing to me."

Internal struggles aside, it all looked rosy just as soon as the Hydra demo hit and people got to experience the game themselves. But even with that buzz going around, there was still enough apprehension to make the team second-guess themselves at every turn, as Jaffe vividly recalls. "I remember being at the office with Todd Papy, looking up at this giant poster of Kratos that we'd had made for E3 – it still hangs in the Sony Santa Monica office, actually – and thinking 'This is going to be fucking *huge*'. But within a week, I was in Gamestop and saw the *God Of War* 'coming soon' box and it was stuck way up high on the shelf out of the way. Nothing had changed – if anything, the game had only gotten better as we got closer to completion – but I remember thinking it was going to fucking tank and be a disaster." But, as it happens, God Of War was quite a good videogame (hence this celebration) and such a success for Sony that it's now easily one of the leading PlayStation brands. But there wasn't always such confidence, even internally. "On the day of release, a friend of mine texted me to say


Stabbing a cyclops in its one eye felt a bit mean at first, but we'd soon come to revel in the carnage.

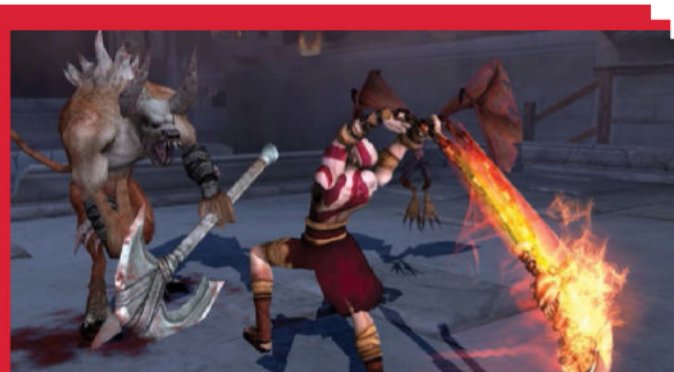

We daren't think how many times we beat that original Hydra demo. It was lots, though.


Magic attacks help out in combat, but are most memorable as showpieces for the PS2 hardware.



ON LETTING GO

CREATING AN ICON for a company you don't belong to can't exactly be easy, but David Jaffe is surprisingly upfront about how he managed to avoid forging bonds with Kratos as a character. "I feel an attachment to the first and second games," he tells us. "The others are titles that I have great respect for – friends of mine have worked on them, some that I hold in incredibly high regard. I love to see them succeed, and as a company as well given the investment. But I don't feel an attachment. I feel a connection to the first two titles but post-*GOWII*, I've had zero regrets. I've watched them and cheered them on from the sidelines but I don't feel like it's my character out there or anything like that."





■ Combining area attacks and more powerful linear strikes makes for a versatile move set – one where mashing is fine but there's depth as well.

WHAT THEY SAID…



It's set in Greece with the mighty Kratos… and we loved every minute of it

Play, issue 129
May 2005

there was a line out the door at the game store," Jaffe tells us. "I thought he was full of shit but there totally was this line out the door. We had days when we thought we were onto something and days where we sat around figuring out what our next careers were going to be 'cause we were clearly no good at this."

■■■ SOME CRITICS WOULD argue that there's a case to be made for the latter, especially in light of some of the game's end-game sequences. "Well, Tobin did the spikes," smiles Jaffe as his new studio explodes with enough laughter to level a small village. The accused interjects. "You were just supposed to get knocked down the spikes a little bit, just so you wouldn't get stuck on them," explains level designer Tobin A. Russell. "You weren't supposed to get knocked off entirely." The problem, it seems, was born of over-confidence. "The coders promised they were going to deal with the collision on that," Jaffe confesses. "But what happened was we had focus-tested the shit out of that game and it's a linear process so by the time we got to focus-testing Hades – which is where that area is, at the end of the level – we were just like 'Nah, we got it, we're good'. It was literally the last level of the game so we didn't focus test that one, and that was the one that bit us in the ass. I regret that section, because it really was a shelf moment for a number of gamers."

[HADES] WAS THE LAST LEVEL OF THE GAME, SO WE DIDN'T FOCUS TEST THAT ONE, AND IT BIT US IN THE ASS

Issues aside, it's fair to say that *God Of War* carved out a template for a generation of would-be mascots to follow. But, as it turns out, some of the biggest names in the business can't tell you when they're onto something. "It was all just a big fucking blur," Jaffe admits. "There were a lot of nights where we were there until three in the morning and those nights blend into the other nights. There are people that you meet that you'd want to work with for the rest of your career, then there are people that I have wonderful memories of but won't speak to today. I can't fucking stand some of them today and some of them I think are just amazing. There are all these little moments that sort of add up to give you a recollection of an experience that, in my mind, was extremely hard but extremely fulfilling and extremely worthwhile. We made something that we're really proud of."



■ Do it, Kratos. Give that guy a really nasty rope burn. The demigod's violent streak can never be sated.



THE RETRO GUIDE TO... METROID

She might not be as well known as Mario or Donkey Kong, but Samus Aran has certainly picked up a number of loyal fans over the past 28 years. **games™** looks back at her impressive 11-game career

METROID IS ONE of Nintendo's least publicised franchises. While there was a flurry of activity in the early to mid Noughties, there have been no new games in four years. In the space of 28 years just 11 main games have appeared, a paltry amount of releases when you look at how quickly franchises like *Assassin's Creed* and *Call Of Duty* are spat out – and yet the adventures of Samus Aran have shifted over 17 million units.

It's an impressive number, until you realise that even low-tier Nintendo franchises such as Kirby have shifted over 34 million units. These lower numbers and a bigger focus on Western gamers (*Super Metroid* was the last game in the series to launch in Japan first) might be why Nintendo has been far more cautious with the franchise's direction compared to some of its others. And yet, despite a lack of games, the series has always managed to feel fresh and exciting…





METROID 1986

SYSTEM: NES

Metroid arrived a few shorts months after *The Legend Of Zelda*, and like Shigeru Miyamoto's game, it made its debut on the 8-bit Famicom. While both titles are adventure games at their core, their approach couldn't be more different. Where *Zelda* opts for a fantasy approach, with a sprawling game world to explore, *Metroid* delivers a claustrophobic side-on adventure. Both games are classics, but we'd argue that the journey of bounty hunter Samus Arun is far more ambitious. The real beauty of *Metroid* is in the organic structure that initially offers only small sections of the huge planet of Zebes to explore, but as Samus searches for Metroids, she gains access to new items and weapons that not only give the player new gameplay mechanics to master, but also unlock previously unavailable parts of the game world.

Nowadays, backtracking in games can be a painful, laborious process, but in *Metroid* it was encouraged. You didn't mind the endless revisiting of past stages, either, because Samus' world just drips with atmosphere, thanks to *Metroid*'s imaginative sprite design and evocative soundtrack. Yoshio Sakamoto, who co-directed the game and worked as its character designer, revealed the team was heavily influenced by Ridley Scott's *Alien*, and while *Metroid* rarely scares you, it does make for a surprisingly bleak, unsettling experience.

Metroid is also memorable for its multiple endings and female protagonist, although you were unaware of her gender until you completed the game. It went on to shift just short of 3 million units, and was re-released in 2002 as part of the GBA's Classic NES series. A surprisingly effective 3D version is also currently available on 3DS.







METROID II: RETURN OF SAMUS 1991

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

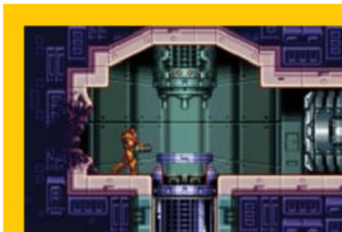
After the sheer scale of *Metroid*, its sequel had a lot to live up to. *Metroid II* might not have reached the same heights as its predecessor, but it remains a resoundingly solid adventure and one of the best examples of the genre on Nintendo's 8-bit handheld. Where *Metroid* was a more brooding, much slower-paced adventure game, *Metroid II* feels a lot more action-packed – the *Aliens*, to *Metroid*'s *Alien* as it were. It still shares many elements with *Metroid*, but the need to clear a certain number of Metroids before Samus can move to the next stage makes *Return Of Samus* feel more arcade-like.



SUPER METROID 1994

SYSTEM: SNES

For many, this remains the best game in the *Metroid* canon. While there's certainly an argument for it to be placed behind the astonishing piece of work that is *Metroid Prime*, it's not hard to understand why so many consider *Super Metroid* to be a 16-bit masterpiece. Notable improvements over previous games include the ability to enable and disable weapons and items via the inventory screen, the ability to move backwards and shoot (far more useful than it sounds) and an extremely useful mini-map. *Super Metroid* almost undid the series, as Nintendo let the franchise stagnate for eight long years, seemingly unsure of what direction to take it in.

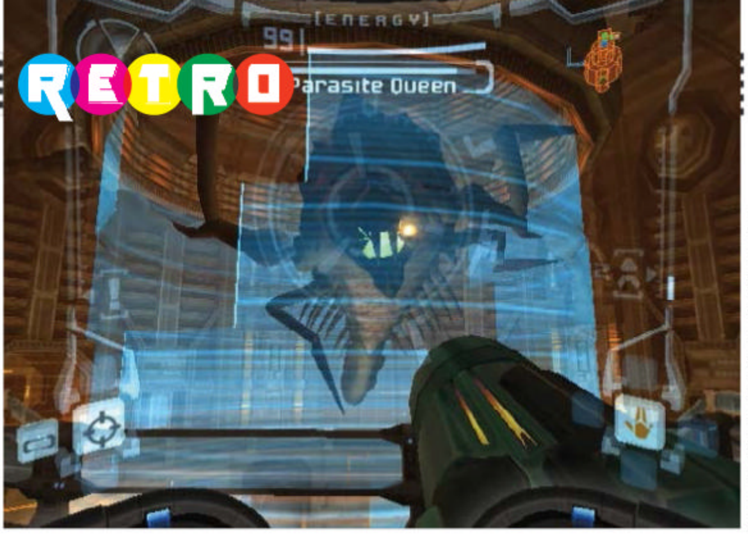




METROID FUSION 2002

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

It's typical – you wait eight years for a new *Metroid* game to appear then two come along at once. While *Metroid* games were quite oppressive to play, due to their atmosphere, *Fusion* could be downright terrifying. This was largely due to the introduction of a deadly parasitic organism called SA-X that hunts Samus down at certain sections of the game. *Metroid* games always made you feel like an underdog (until you retrieve all your latent powers), but being stalked through the dingy corridors by a virtually unstoppable fully-armed clone of yourself was incredibly tense and could be just as traumatic as the well-choreographed boss encounters. *Fusion* was arguably one of the more challenging games in the series, so it's handy that Samus received a number of useful new skills. While she could grab onto ledges and climb ladders and railings, her most useful new trick was the ability to absorb any nearby X Parasites, boosting her health, missile and bomb supplies.



METROID PRIME 2002

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE

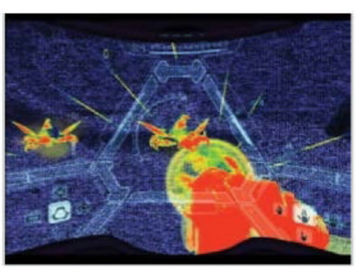
Metroid Prime could have been a mess. Nintendo had been struggling to create a 3D *Metroid* for years, bypassing the N64 completely and eventually setting its sights on the GameCube. Texas-based developer Retro Studios was given the unenviable task of creating Samus' first 3D adventure and began work on a third-person action game. Shigeru Miyamoto wasn't happy with the game's direction, insisting on a first-person perspective and causing Retro Studios to virtually scrap all its existing assets. Many developers would have quit right there, but rather than give up, Retro Studios created one of the most astonishing adventures to ever appear on Nintendo's diminutive console.

Metroid Prime is not in any sense a traditional first-person shooter. Samus' ability to lock on to enemies and evade incoming attacks immediately made it stand apart, while the carefully balanced controls made the numerous platform sections incredibly easy to pull off. While it's predominantly first-person, Samus' Morph Ball ability utilises a third-person perspective, which is typically used for the few puzzle-like elements found throughout the game. It features the same organic exploratory approach of previous games, but introduces new gameplay mechanics in the form of a number of different visors that Samus must switch between. In addition to thermal imaging and X-Ray vision, Samus can also scan pretty much anything she encounters, from enemies to locations. Scanning not only reveals weak points in bosses, but also slowly unlocks *Metroid Prime*'s well-crafted story, which is arguably one of the best in the series. The constant switching is also found in *Metroid*'s combat, with Samus changing between plasma cannons as the game progresses.

In addition to its absorbing gameplay, *Prime* is incredible to look at, with lush welcoming environments that still stand up today. From the icy wastes of the Phendrana Drifts, to the gloomy depths of the Phazon Mines, *Prime* is continually a joy to explore, with little touches like explosions momentarily reflecting Samus' face in her visor only adding to the atmosphere. A huge success for Nintendo, it also allowed linkage to *Metroid Fusion*, unlocking a number of bonuses, including the original *Metroid*.

> **"PRIME'S ENVIRONMENTS STILL STAND UP TODAY"**

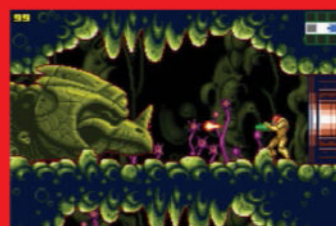




METROID: ZERO MISSION 2004

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

This is easily one of gaming's best remakes, matched only by Capcom's astonishing GameCube update of *Resident Evil*. It's effectively a reimagining of the original NES game rather than a complete remake, built with the Metroid Fusion engine after director Yoshiro Sakamoto decided against porting *Super Metroid*. While many sections will feel instantly familiar, there is enough variance to the stage layouts to ensure that even veterans will find the return to Zebes feels fresh and different. While some of Samus' later moves have been retrofitted into the game, it's the final leg of *Zero Mission* that makes the most impact. The ending of the original NES game results in a brand new chapter, where Samus, captured and stripped of her power suit, must sneak around with a weedy pistol and fend off a swarm of space pirates. It might be short, but it remains a fitting example of how to update a classic.





METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES 2004

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE

The big draw for Retro Studios' *Prime* sequel was the addition of a much-touted multiplayer mode. While a nice idea, it makes for a clunky experience due to the lock-on system used and paltry amount of gameplay modes. In fact, it proves that the *Metroid Prime* games *aren't* FPS games, despite the viewpoint.

Echoes has Samus switching between two parallel dimensions known as Light and Dark Aether. Samus' health continually deteriorates while she's in contact with Dark Aether, causing her to seek out the small safe zones found there. It adds a little needed additional layer of difficulty to an already tough game. It's a pity that *Echoes* feels so tough in places, as the actual plot (which continues directly on from *Prime*) is extremely strong, focusing on the Dark Samus created in the closing credits of Samus' previous adventure.







YOSHIO SAKAMOTO INTERVIEW

The Super Metroid director on his Super Famicom debut



How did you come to work on *Super Metroid*?
My boss [producer Makoto Kanoh] told me that *Metroid* was really popular in North America, so he encouraged me to produce a new *Metroid* game with the high-quality graphics that were becoming possible thanks to the Super Famicom. Of course I said, 'Yes, I'd like to try doing that.' The game design and concept had already been established before *Metroid II* was produced.

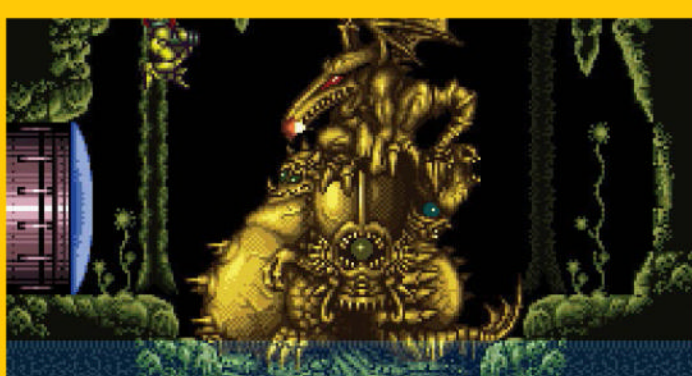
What goals did you have in mind for the game?
When it came to making another sequel, this time for the Super Famicom, we really wanted to see how far we could push the SFC.

Was it an issue that only three of the original *Metroid* team worked on the project?
The rest of the [NCL side] was made up of young trainee developers. Of course young people can be quite impertinent – and those on the *Super Metroid* team certainly were – but I think that's quite important in a way. These young people had enough about them to help us a lot. There were many different personalities in the *Super Metroid* team, which was a good thing. It was a harsh development environment, so I'm sure that some of the staff didn't enjoy the work, but generally the team was full of the 'Let's go for it!' spirit. I think that was partly because of the timing as well [with the SFC].

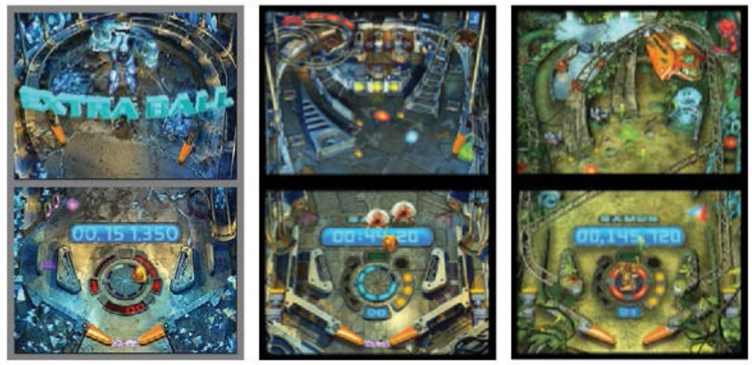
***Super Metroid* was your first Super Famicom game. What hurdles did you face?**
One problem with the shift to the Super Famicom was that it meant we suddenly needed a lot more sprites and artwork, so we shared the map and enemy design responsibilities throughout the team, with everyone making some input in those areas. But then doing that resulted in a complete mishmash of styles because of each designer's individual preference, so in the end I had to ask [Tomomi] Yamane to retouch everything that had been submitted, bringing it all together as one consistent design.

How did you find working with Gunpei Yokoi?
Yokoi-san, who at the time was my section chief and who always had fresh ideas, was always angry when he saw us all completely absorbed and working crazy overtime on *Super Metroid.* He came in and said, 'Are you lot trying to produce a work of art or something?' Although he was really unhappy with us, and even though he wasn't the type to dish out praise, Yokoi-san was constantly playing *Super Metroid* once we'd finished it – he was hooked.

When other developers brought their action games to Nintendo, he'd always compare them with *Super Metroid* and invariably ended up recommending the third-party developer to 'go away and play *Super Metroid*'. That's how fond he was of our game.







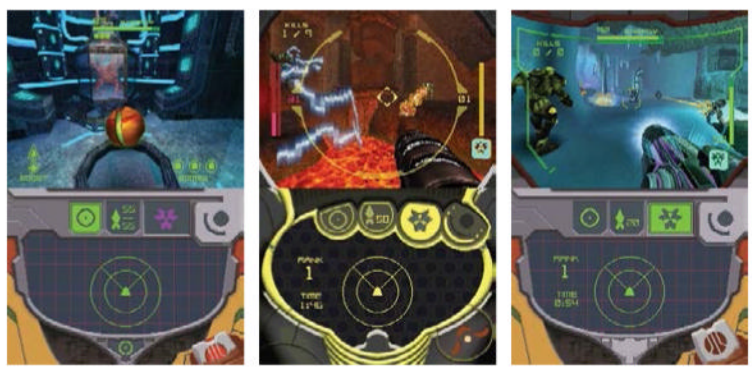
METROID PRIME PINBALL 2005

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

A *Metroid* pinball game sounds ridiculous until you actually play it. The included GBA Rumble pack adds little to the fun, but the DS's dual screens ensures that you can really appreciate the well-designed tables that Fuse Games has created.

As with *Metroid Prime*, the aim of *Pinball* is to require 12 artifacts, which are spread across four of the six available tables. Each table is based on a specific area of the Tallon Overworld, and is filled with clever ramps and scoring multipliers. A number of additional mini-games are included, while many of *Prime*'s boss encounters are replicated. The ball's physics are greatly improved over *Mario Pinball Land* (another Fuse Games effort) while the moody aesthetics of the GameCube adventure are perfectly replicated.

"A METROID PINBALL GAME SOUNDS RIDICULOUS UNTIL YOU PLAY IT"



METROID PRIME HUNTERS 2006

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

Metroid Prime Hunters gives you a good indication of what a N64-based *Metroid* might have looked like. While it can't hope to match the aesthetic brilliance of *Prime*, it looked mighty impressive on release, showcasing the graphical grunt of Nintendo's new handheld. The plot takes place between *Prime* and *Echoes*, and sees Samus embroiled in a battle with six other bounty hunters. It feels more linear than the *Prime* games, but still manages to pack a strong narrative punch. The multiplayer is equally enjoyable, with each bounty hunter having unique abilities that make them feel completely different to play. One of the early showcases of the DS (a demo was given away at launch) *Hunters*' game modes and fast-paced action proved that a *Metroid* multiplayer could work with a little thought. It's a pity then that *Hunters* is seriously hampered by its various control systems, which, while capable, never feel comfortable to use for extended amount of times. The excellent *Kid Icarus: Uprising* would suffer from a similar problem six years later.

METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION 2007

SYSTEM: WII

Corruption was a suitably epic end for Retro Studios' Prime trilogy. As its title suggests, gameplay mechanics revolve around Samus becoming corrupted by the events that took place in Echoes. This corruption comes in the form of the rather nifty 'Hypermode' that massively augments Samus' powers at the expense of her health. It's a fantastic spin on the risk vs reward mechanics of other games, and really spurs you on to finish this excellent adventure.

It's the sublime use of the Wii's motion controls that really makes *Corruption* stand apart from its peers though. They work amazingly well, making you feel like Samus' arm cannon is an extension of your own arm; easily silencing anyone who scoffs at Nintendo's choice of control method, the motion controls add to the overall experience, pulling you deeper into the beautifully constructed world that Retro Studios has created.





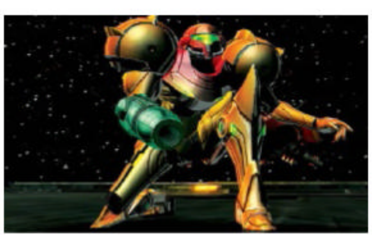
METROID PRIME: TRILOGY 2009

SYSTEM: WII

This entry seems a little like cheating, as it's effectively a collection of all three *Prime* games. It's so much more though as the Wii's brilliant controls for *Corruption* translate perfectly to *Prime* and *Echoes*, greatly improving them in the process. Other improvements include shorter load times, upgraded textures, bloom lighting and a general graphical upgrade to already impressive games. *Corruption*'s award system is also retro-fitted into both titles, while the boss encounters from *Echoes* have been made easier. It's a superb collection of games that now fetches a relatively high price on auction sites. Interestingly, both *Metroid Prime* and its sequel were released as separate games in Japan as part of the Wii's New Play Control! series.









SAMUS CAMEOS

Metroid's star doesn't just collect bounties

Samus Aran made her first cameo in *Famicom Wars.* Since then, she's appeared in a variety of games, across several Nintendo consoles. She can be spied playing an upright bass at the end of NES *Tetris* and appears in the background of the Game Boy's *F-1 Race*.

Her ship turns up in *Galactic Pinball* for the ill-fated Virtual Console and she can be found resting in a bed in *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars.* She's cropped up in numerous other games, from *Kirby* to *Animal Crossing* and *Dead Or Alive Dimensions*, but it's the *Super Smash Bros* series that many gamers will recognise her from, despite her own excellent games. She's been in it since the original N64 game, with her alternate Zero Suit incarnation debuting in *Super Smash Bros Brawl.*





METROID: OTHER M 2010

SYSTEM: WII

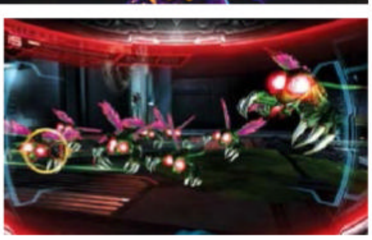
■ Samus' last adventure is something of a bittersweet one. While it delivers the greatest action to appear in the series to date, it also turns Samus into an extremely unlikable protagonist. Nintendo's heroine has always been tough, and was typically someone who relied more on action than words, but here's she's been reduced to a whiny petulant child, unhappy with her lot in life and appears as if she's waltzed out of a bad soap opera.

Still, if you can ignore the overly dramatic cutscenes and personality transplant, you'll discover *Other M* to be a ridiculously rollicking adventure that's filled to the brim with some of the best boss fights in the series to date. Melee combat features quite heavily in *Other M*, with Samus having access to a surprising range of moves. Turning the Wii Remote to face the screen sees the action switching to first-person, giving the player the ability to lock-on to targets and fire missiles. It's a neat set of mechanics to switch between and makes the franchise feel incredibly fresh. Here's hoping that Samus' next adventure continues to take the series in new and exciting directions.

"HERE SHE'S BEEN REDUCED TO A WHINY PETULANT CHILD, UNHAPPY WITH HER LOT IN LIFE"







MORE METROID CLONES

Loved Metroid? Try these for size

WONDER BOY: THE DRAGON'S TRAP 1989



■ This delightful Master System game sees Wonder Boy getting transformed into a dragon during the game's opening boss fight. As the game progresses he turns into a variety of animals, which in turn slowly opens up the gigantic game world.

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT 1997



■ *Symphony Of The Night* was a huge risk for Konami, as it deviated from both the familiar *Castlevania* template and was a 2D game in a world that was obsessed by 3D. The gamble paid off handsomely, creating the metroidvania sub-genre.

CAVE STORY 2004



■ This freeware PC game took five years to create, being crafted by Daisuke "Pixel" Amaya in his spare time. It's a delightful game with tight controls, beautiful pixel art and some very inventive level design. Grab the 3DS version if you can find it.

SHADOW COMPLEX 2009



■ This stunning effort from Chair utilises the popular 2.5d format to tell the over-the-top adventures of Jason Flemming as he searches for his missing girlfriend. While it maintains the exploration elements of the *Metroid* series, there's a far bigger emphasis on mayhem.

GUACAMELEE 2013



■ Recently released on Xbox One and PS4, *Guacamelee* is a superb metroidvania that follows the exploits of a humble farmer on a mission to save El Presidente's daughter. Its vibrant visuals and creative Mexican theme sets it apart from similar games.

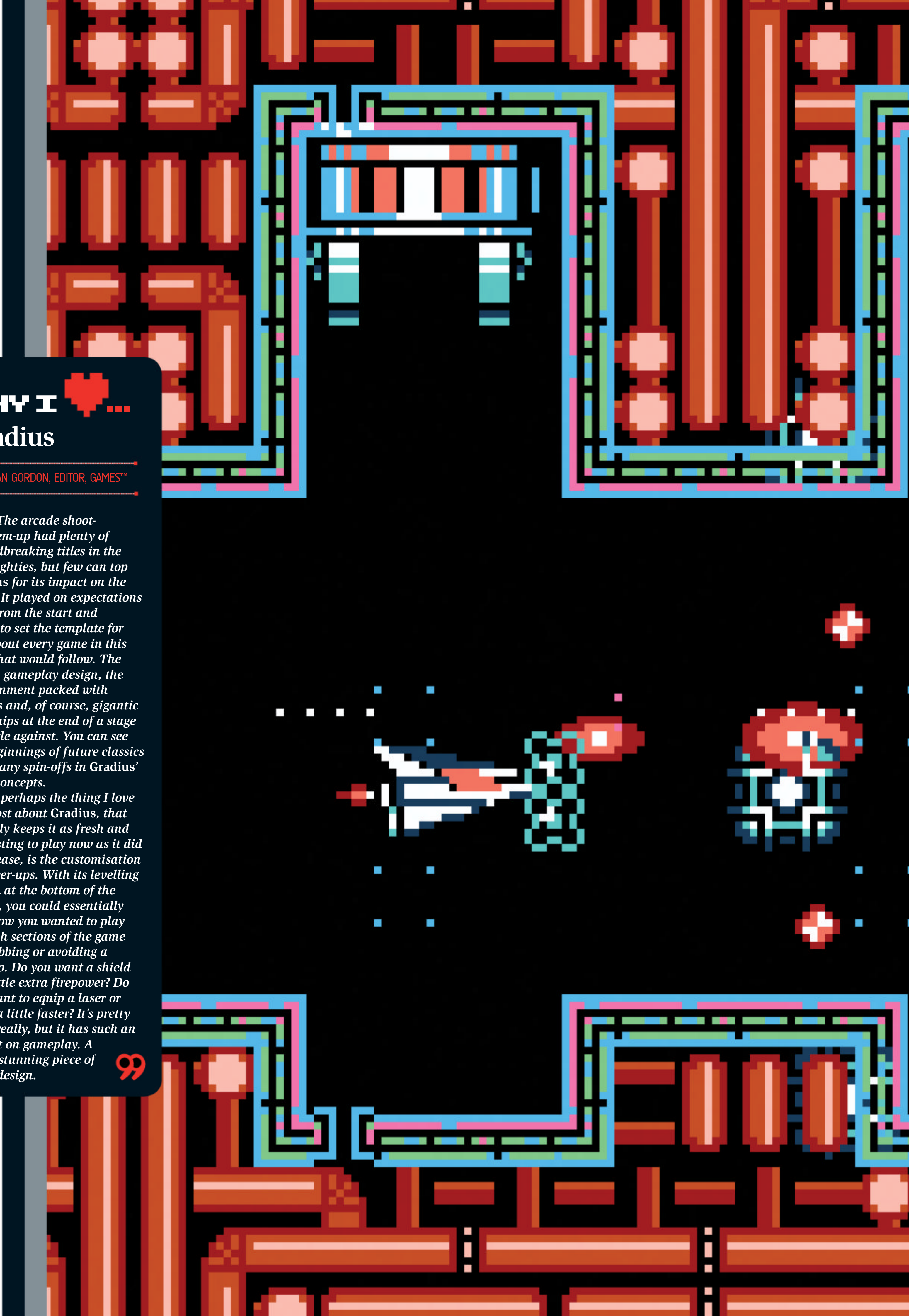
WHY I ♥...

Gradius

JONATHAN GORDON, EDITOR, GAMES™

The arcade shoot-em-up had plenty of groundbreaking titles in the mid-Eighties, but few can top Gradius *for its impact on the genre. It played on expectations right from the start and began to set the template for just about every game in this field that would follow. The tunnel gameplay design, the environment packed with threats and, of course, gigantic boss ships at the end of a stage to battle against. You can see the beginnings of future classics and many spin-offs in* Gradius*' early concepts.*

But perhaps the thing I love the most about Gradius*, that actually keeps it as fresh and interesting to play now as it did on release, is the customisation of power-ups. With its levelling system at the bottom of the screen, you could essentially pick how you wanted to play through sections of the game by grabbing or avoiding a pick-up. Do you want a shield or a little extra firepower? Do you want to equip a laser or move a little faster? It's pretty basic really, but it has such an impact on gameplay. A really stunning piece of game design.*





"You can see the beginnings of future classics and many spin-offs in Gradius' early concepts"

JONATHAN GORDON, EDITOR, GAMES™







INTERVIEW

HAIL! HE'S STILL CRAZY

Kenji Kanno is the man behind one of arcade gaming's true greats: Crazy Taxi. We sat down with the Sega stalwart for a good long chat

While he's worked on one other title (1997's arcade-only *Top Skater*), it's fair to say Kenji Kanno is seen as a one-series man. He's the mind behind the original three *Crazy Taxi* games, as well as the PSP spin-off *Fare Wars* and the latest in the series – a free-to-play smartdevice version known as *City Rush*. Other than that, Kanno hasn't been directly involved in the creation of a game – so it's a uniquely interesting experience to speak to the man. We did just that, trying to find out what he thinks of the series he has created and what he thinks of its lasting legacy with gamers.

Why, after all this time, have you suddenly decided to bring us a new version of *Crazy Taxi*? Despite the perpetual popularity of racing games (and specifically open-world ones), it seems like the revival of Crazy Taxi has come out of the blue...

I had been thinking about it a while and wanted to try something new in the *Crazy Taxi* series. At the same time I had a chance to have a conversation with Haruki Satomi – he's currently the CEO at Sega Networks, but I spoke to him before he was CEO and he told me he wanted to bring *Crazy Taxi* to a smartphone platform. I've been working with Hard Light Studio in the UK, where *City Rush* was born.

Had you had something in mind for a long time with the franchise, or was it more of a spur of the moment thing?

A couple of years after *Crazy Taxi 3* was released I tried something different [*Fare Wars* on PSP], but after that I got feedback from various people that they really enjoyed the original *Crazy Taxi* games. So I started thinking about what I could create that would be new, to surprise people and bring enjoyment to them.

Would you agree that smartphone and tablet gaming bears a huge similarity to arcade gaming, with their focus on quick, casual play and so on?

There is a similarity between smartphone titles and arcade games – you can play the game for a short time, enjoying it very quickly and casually.

Why do you think the *Crazy Taxi* series is so enduring and popular? What is it about the game that people love?

> **MY METHOD OF CREATION IS TO DECIDE THE MUSIC TRACK I'D LIKE TO USE IN A GAME BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE**

It's fairly difficult to answer that, because I was in the middle of it all on the team who created the game. So it's hard to answer why it has been loved by fans for such a long time. As well as the music on the soundtrack, the style of game was very new, making it very well accepted – that's probably one of the reasons why it has been loved for such a long time.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHT

"IT'S ODD TO go back to 1999 and think there hadn't been anything quite like *Crazy Taxi* before – it just seems so obvious in hindsight: a super-fast, super-silly game where you pick someone up and go from point A to point B as quickly (and safely) as possible. Simple, straightforward, surprisingly elegant (even if crazy), *Crazy Taxi* lit up the arcade scene at the end of the millennium."

KENJI KANNO – ON CRAZY TAXI – ARCADE



Craaaazy jumps were often necessary to find shortcuts and more importantly, they were bloody good fun.

What was the attitude that you brought – the thinking behind the original game?
It's a bit of a philosophical answer, but in the end, play is providing or receiving the stimulation of fun. If you get the same stimulation over and over, you'll get bored, so my focus was to think about how I could give new stimulation to users who play games. So that's why it was sort of a collaboration between the music and the new game design… I was focusing on creating new ways to stimulate for fans and people who play.

Of everything you created with the first game, what is it about *Crazy Taxi* that makes you the proudest to look back on?
I get the chance to speak to people like journalists who speak different languages and come from different cultures, and I get the chance to get positive feedback on the *Crazy Taxi* games I created. I feel slightly awkward – in a positive way – and at the same time I feel happy and glad to receive such positive feedback. When I visited the United States and had a chance to speak with developers in America and hear they liked *Crazy Taxi* – I felt the same way: awkward, but happy and glad. Hearing it from people who don't speak Japanese… it just makes me feel happy.



Crazy Taxi 3 wasn't quite as well-received as the previous two in the series.

So do you still have the same passion for the series as a whole?
Of course!

Looking back at the core trilogy, how do you feel with the benefit of hindsight?
When I look back at the series I feel creating something is difficult – in both a good and bad way. Also if I look back now I think, because it's the *Crazy Taxi* series, you have to hold onto something. But more than holding onto something existing, it's more important to have the courage to break something and create something new. That's more important to me now, looking back.

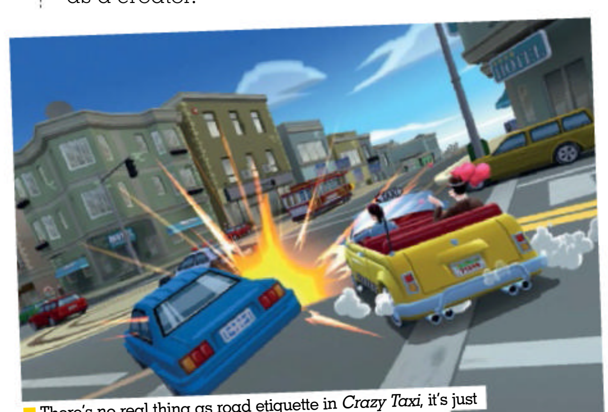
Is there anything in the first three games that you'd want to go back and change?
If you look at *Crazy Taxi 1*, *2* and *3* specifically, there isn't that much I reflect on where we should have done something differently. When I wanted to have some features in each title, they always came from very deep in my mind and so I always felt I had done the best I could. Having said that, there are two things I wanted to actually change – one; multiplayer, and two; transition between day and night that affects gameplay – passenger attitudes, the whole atmosphere would change when time transitioned. I couldn't put those elements in the game for previous titles.

When you first had the idea for *Crazy Taxi*, was it easy to get Sega on board?
It wasn't that hard, because my boss was very cooperative and open to creating prototypes at the side of main projects. But I think my boss must have had a difficult time to present such a new concept to board members and management, to get through that and get a greenlight.

Of the titles released – not including *City Rush* – which is your favourite *Crazy Taxi* game?
If I'm asked that question, of course I'll say I love every game equally. But having said that it's not to do with me liking or disliking certain games, but without a beginning, the series doesn't have anything – therefore the first one was important to me.

Have you ever wanted to branch out and make different games?
Of course I'd love to make something different. If I have got nothing I would like to create, I will stop being a developer. But of course I have something!

Are you happy with how the series is seen by gamers?
As the creator of the game I purely feel glad and happy to receive such feedback from fans and users. There are some products that aren't discussed or received well, but *Crazy Taxi* has many people discussing it and it was received very well – this was very fortunate and it makes me very happy as a creator.



There's no real thing as road etiquette in *Crazy Taxi*, it's just you versus the clock with other cars getting in your way…

You're something of an elder statesman in the industry – what are your feelings on the state of modern gaming from a developer's standpoint?
I have a feeling that something interesting will happen – that's the feeling I get from the current state of gaming. In the past, there were clear lines – this is arcade, this is console, this is something else – there were clear lines between each section. However, now there are fewer boundaries and it feels more like something new. Of course, there are chances you might fail, but at the same time there are more chances than ever to succeed. Also, creators and consumers are more flexible than ever – so generally speaking I think something interesting is going to happen in the future of the gaming business.

Did you have to consider this flexibility when you were making *City Rush*?
I think the most important thing is to have a solid idea of what I'd like to deliver, what emotional reaction I want from players. For example, when you think about giving a present to your partner, you think 'how can I please them?' Should you send a text? An email? A letter? Go see them in person? But the essence is the same – the most important thing is to have a solid idea of how users like to have fun and how I'd like them to experience it emotionally. From a business point of view, the way the company charges is different, it's changing, so it could be from a customer, it could be from elsewhere. Companies get smarter, but the most important thing in a game is having a solid idea of what kind of feeling you want to deliver to users.

What have you found to be your main inspiration for your games?
I watch drama a lot and I try to read a lot of books – usually Japanese novels – and I watch anime, and read manga. They're my main inspirations. Out of those things, other games are probably the least of my inspirations!

In the UK, the arcade industry is all but dead. Being as involved in some of its best days as you were, how does this make you feel?
The way people live is so different to how it was a while ago – a long time ago there were no mobiles, so people had to contact each other on landlines, but just like that changed, arcades have to change, too.

THERE ISN'T THAT MUCH I REFLECT ON WHERE WE SHOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY

But the arcade is where people can communicate in person, physically, so it's important to think of something new that can fit into how people live these days, into the environment. I'd like to create something new to fit into that new arcade environment.

And what's it like working with a British studio (Hard Light Games)?
It is very interesting working with British developers. The most interesting thing, I thought, was how the British team thought up new ideas I didn't think I could have come up with. British developers think in a similar way to Japanese – it's inspirational. Hard Light is British, but I have worked with a US studio before – I found it interesting to see the difference between how US and UK studios work.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHT



"WE WERE STILL in the period where something considered 'arcade perfect' was a rarity, but *Crazy Taxi* on Dreamcast was everything we could have hoped for and a bit more too. It's the game that played out as the background to a million parties around the world back in 2000. With the addition of a new stage to explore, mini-games and customisable rules, it still holds up brilliantly to this day."

KENJI KANNO – CRAZY TAXI – DREAMCAST



Fortunately *Crazy Taxi* was moving too fast to really focus on how similar the passengers looked.



Is it easy to keep the core experience familiar to gamers when you're working with these studios that have difference working methods?
No matter if the development team is based in Japan, the UK, wherever, it's always difficult to create something. The most important thing is to share ideas and why each person thinks in a certain way, why a certain person thinks a process would work in a certain way. Matching up those ideas between each party is the most important part, so the overall approach has everyone on – more or less – the same page.

One thing everyone wants to know: is *Crazy Taxi* coming back to console?
I get that question all the time from journalists, so now my internal gauge is gradually increased. Such feedback about bringing *Crazy Taxi* to console – if I get more feedback like it – will fill up the internal gauge, and when it reaches maximum it'll come!

And finally, who chose that iconic Offspring track for the original game?
I did. I chose The Offspring and the soundtrack to use on the original *Crazy Taxi*. First, I loved that music. Second, originally I wanted to create an action game. For action games it's important to have the right tempo and rhythm to match up with gameplay. So for *Crazy Taxi* it's a game about driving around a city in a crazy manner… My method of creation is to decide the music track I'd like to use in a game before anything else. With the action game, the city, that kind of tempo in mind, I went to record shops like Tower Records and listened to a lot of music, bought a lot of CDs. Out of all those I thought the Offspring and Bad Religion tracks suited my mental image best.



BEST INTRO

POKÉMON FIRE RED/LEAF GREEN

GAME FREAK / THE POKÉMON COMPANY, [NINTENDO] GAMEBOY ADVANCE **2004**

WE'VE USED THE *Fire Red/Leaf Green* versions of *Pokémon* here for illustrative purposes, but the 'best intro' label can be applied to all the *Pokémon* games, really – yes, they're somewhat formulaic, but therein lies the charm: each new adventure takes your protagonist, a professor and a mascot Pokémon for that generation and gives you a quick rundown of Pokémon lore, always accompanied by the soaring and inspirational theme, comprised of a constantly evolving four-note motif. Your high-resolution Trainer is subsequently shrunk down and plopped into the world – a perfect bit of symbolism for how we, as players, are taken by the hand into the new adventure that awaits, before we're offered the choice of a 'fire, water or grass' starter. As intros go, it doesn't get much more engaging.



GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT

Released: 8 October 1992 **Publisher:** Virgin (EU), Midway Games (US) **Developer:** Midway Games (Arcade), Acclaim Games (Consoles)
System: Arcade, Amiga, Sega MegaDrive, SNES



Ed Boon and John Tobias' decapitated heads can be seen impaled on spikes at the bottom of The Pit stage —possibly the best developer cameo ever?

The original video(game) nasty, Mortal Kombat has had a much bigger impact on the games industry than is immediately evident - we examine how a game built in under a year shaped gaming forever

THERE ARE FEW games franchises as notably controversial as *Mortal Kombat* – it was one of the first videogames to divide gamers and the mainstream press, its bloody depiction of one-on-one violence a step too far for some of the more conservative commentators when it was released in late 1992. Arriving first on arcade machines, the game that would go on to spawn nine proper sequels and a slew of licensed spin offs (and some *terrible* movies…) almost wasn't made at all.

In 1991, Midway tasked developers Ed Boon and John Tobias with creating a fighting game that could be put together and ready for release within a year – presumably to cash in on the hype that Capcom's *Street Fighter II* had initiated a year earlier. Ten months later, the game was ready – an initial development team of four people taking on the bulk of development. Impressive considering the whole game is crammed into 8mb of data, with a 64-colour palette and 300 animations per each of the seven characters.

On top of that, *Mortal Kombat* also introduced its unique five-button control scheme that has since become a standard in the series. A series of incredibly basic light attacks are complimented by launchers, low moves and supers – all of which use simple left, right, up or down inputs, unlike *Street Fighter*'s quarter- and half-circles. This, along with the relatively shallow move pools, made it far easier for casuals to pick up than its genre rival: another reason the game quickly gained mass popularity.

AFTER SUCCESS IN the arcades, *Mortal Kombat*'s name began to circulate around gaming circles and, inevitably, the media – it matched even its inspirational peer, *Street Fighter II*, in terms of popularity, by 1993. Of course, the ultra-violence and over-the-top executions garnered the most attention; with international press claiming the game glorifies murder and violence. It's comic book violence, sure – something the action movies of the time easily

THE ANATOMY OF MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A GREAT GLUT OF GAMES, BUT WHAT LEAD TO ITS CREATION IN THE FIRST PLACE?



STREET FIGHTER II

★ *Street Fighter II*, Capcom's seminal fighting game, directly caused *Mortal Kombat*'s creation. When Midway's rival launched, Capcom went as far as advertising *Street Fighter* as the superior fighting title in an attempt to stem *Mortal Kombat*'s very impressive sales rush.



JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

★ In the very early stages of the game's development, the studio had named Liu Kang 'Minamoto no Yoshitsune' – a name later dropped by Boon because he "just couldn't deal with the name". Goro, too, came from a Japanese myth – based on Rokurokubi: demons with stretchy heads.

MIDWAY'S SCHEDULE

★ The reason that *Mortal Kombat* had such a short time in development (only ten months) was because Midway only ever intended it to be a stop-gap in its other arcade plans... this then allowed Ed Boon and John Tobias free reign on the project, and, as they say, the rest is history!

outclassed – but being able to enact it *yourself* didn't sit too well with a lot of people, especially the parents of children who would wander into arcades and play the game without any kind of supervision.

The press backlash against the game's trademark 'Fatality' finishers was in full swing by the time the game was ready to move into the home console market. For publishers, this was a tantalising opportunity: all news is good news, and during the Nintendo Vs. Sega console wars of the early Nineties, Sega executives were licking their lips at the opportunity to get one over on their Nintendo rivals. Sensing the hunger for the blood and violence *Mortal Kombat* offered in the now-maturing games community, Sega cannily released the home version on the MegaDrive with the 'Arcade Edition' dub: something Nintendo's tame, bloodless, murder-less version didn't on the SNES.

The result? Sega saw their market share climb to 55% in 1993, the first time Sega had ever pulled ahead of Nintendo in the console war, with thanks to some particularly aggressive advertising on Sega's part ("Genesis does what Nintendon't" was a genuine slogan used at the time). Sega had tapped into that anarchic, 'screw the man' rebellious nature of the Nineties with much aplomb.

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODY DEPICTION OF ONE-ON-ONE VIOLENCE WAS TOO MUCH FOR SOME COMMENTATORS

KEY FACTS

■ *Mortal Kombat* mainstay Jonny Cage was supposed to be a virtual version of Jean-Claude Van Damme (hence the 'JC' initials) but the actor dropped out during negotiations… leaving a parody in his place

■ The game went through the names *Kumite*, *Dragon Attack*, *Death Blow* and *Fatality!* before the developers finally settled on *Mortal Kombat* after someone mysteriously wrote a K over the C on a drawing board

■ *Mortal Kombat* veteran Raiden was based on the character Lightning in *Big Trouble In Little China*

■■■ TRANSIENT PROFITS ARE all well and good, but the decision to release the game uncensored would return to haunt Sega and Acclaim when their game was taken to the Supreme Court under accusation of being 'a menace to America's children'. Sega executives believed the case was pushed to court by Nintendo, though no solid proof of this exists.

Without *Mortal Kombat* bringing the 'problem' with violent videogames to the attention of the general public, we wouldn't have the Entertainment Software Association (a body that started out as the Independent Digital Software Association). From lobbying in Washington to fighting censorship, the ESA vowed to self-regulate, setting up the ERSB ratings system – which influenced our European PEGI (Pan European Game Information) – and even lead to the creation of E3.

Since then, aside from a little in-fighting between hardware manufacturers, the games industry has been largely united in its drive to present games as equal to other media. Without *Mortal Kombat* setting a very graphic precedent in what games *could* get away with, it's likely the industry might have travelled a safer path, making smaller ripples before ever hitting a level where the American senate had to take them seriously as a form of entertainment. It's quite ironic for a game built in ten months, really, but without *Mortal Kombat*, this industry would be nowhere near as developed as it is today.

GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODIEST MOMENTS

THE ORIGINAL MORTAL KOMBAT IS THE REASON OUR INDUSTRY IS BOUND BY A SELF-IMPOSED RATINGS SYSTEM… BUT THAT GAME'S VIOLENCE AND GORE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING. DON'T SCAN THIS PAGE IF YOU DON'T WANT ANY HIGH-OCTANE NIGHTMARE FUEL…



SUB-ZERO'S SPINE RIP FATALITY

■ THIS FATALITY WAS actually referenced explicitly in the court case brought against Midway and Sega in 1993. It even inspired Senator Lieberman (opposing Sega) to quote "I was startled […] And at the end, if you really did well, you'd get to decide whether to decapitate...how to kill the other guy, how to pull his head off. There was all sorts of blood flying around."



FALLING INTO THE PIT

■ THE SECOND ITERATION of The Pit (it was the keystone stage of the first game) was much more imposing and terrifying than the first. It was the first time the *Mortal Kombat* series deviated from its side-on view, instead opting for an overhead view as your opponent plummeted to the ground, before that spine-shattering *crunch* audio effect… which we can still hear today.



KUNG LAO'S HAT SPLIT

■ WHEN DEVELOPING THE second *Mortal Kombat*, the developers wanted to include everything they planned for the first game, but didn't have time due to scheduling. As a result, new characters, fatalities and stages were introduced. The best one (and one of creator Ed Boon's favourites) was Kung Loa splitting an opponent in half with his weirdly sharp hat.



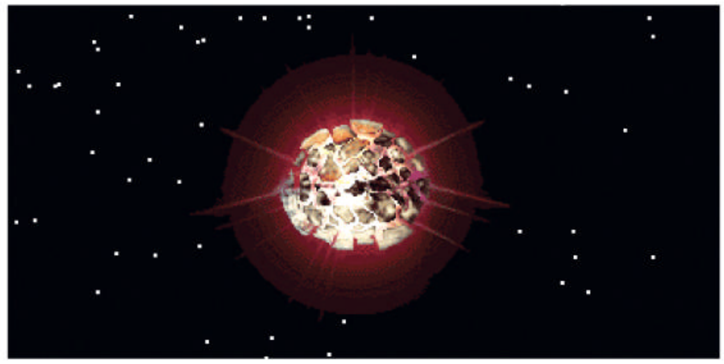
REPTILE'S ACID SPEW

■ AFTER HIS WEIRD cameo in the first game, Reptile graduated to legitimate playable character by the time *Mortal Kombat II* hit the shelves. His fatality involved spewing acid onto the opponent, melting them to the bones. Because of this, the game was banned in Germany and censored in Japan, the first time a Western game was censored in the country.



KABAL'S TERRIFYING FACE

■ KABAL MADE HIS debut in *Mortal Kombat III*. He was supposedly horribly disfigured, leading to his reliance on a respirator and a mask that protects his face. One of his first fatalities involved the removal of his mask, to reveal a face so horrifying that it *literally* scares the soul out of his opponent.



EXPLODING YOURSELF, YOUR ENEMY... AND THE EARTH

■ SMOKE HAS ALWAYS been strange, his whole existence merged with the Sub-Zero moniker and the ninja brothers that go with it. Smoke's even weirder moves culminate in him firing a bajillion grenades out of himself and causing the world to explode.



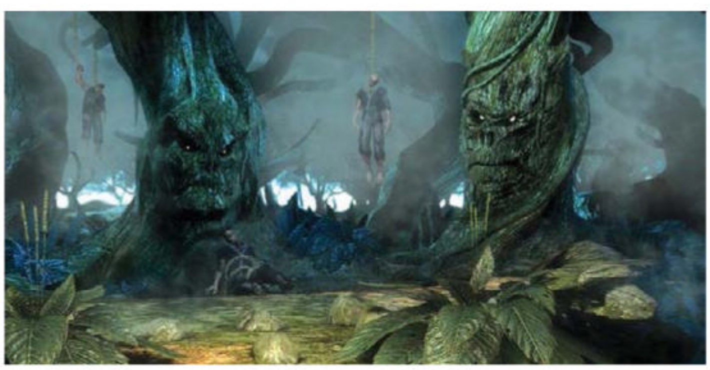
MEAT'S VERY EXISTENCE

■ ONE OF *MORTAL KOMBAT 4*'s hidden characters, Meat is supposed to be an experimental subject that escaped Shang Tsung's custody before whatever cruel intentions of the mad sorcerer were fulfilled. Completing all Group Mode challenges in *4* would make any character you select become Meat – so you couldn't escape him and his rotting flesh and his hanging eye.



THE REBOOT'S 'X-RAY' MOVES

■ DURING THE PR campaign for what the media would come to call *Mortal Kombat 9*, Ed Boon promised fans of the AWOL franchise that when they finally got the new game, they'd bask in its violent glory – promising it would be the most violent yet. Boon wasn't lying – fatalities aside, the 'X-Ray' moves alone could have satiated our gore-hunger.



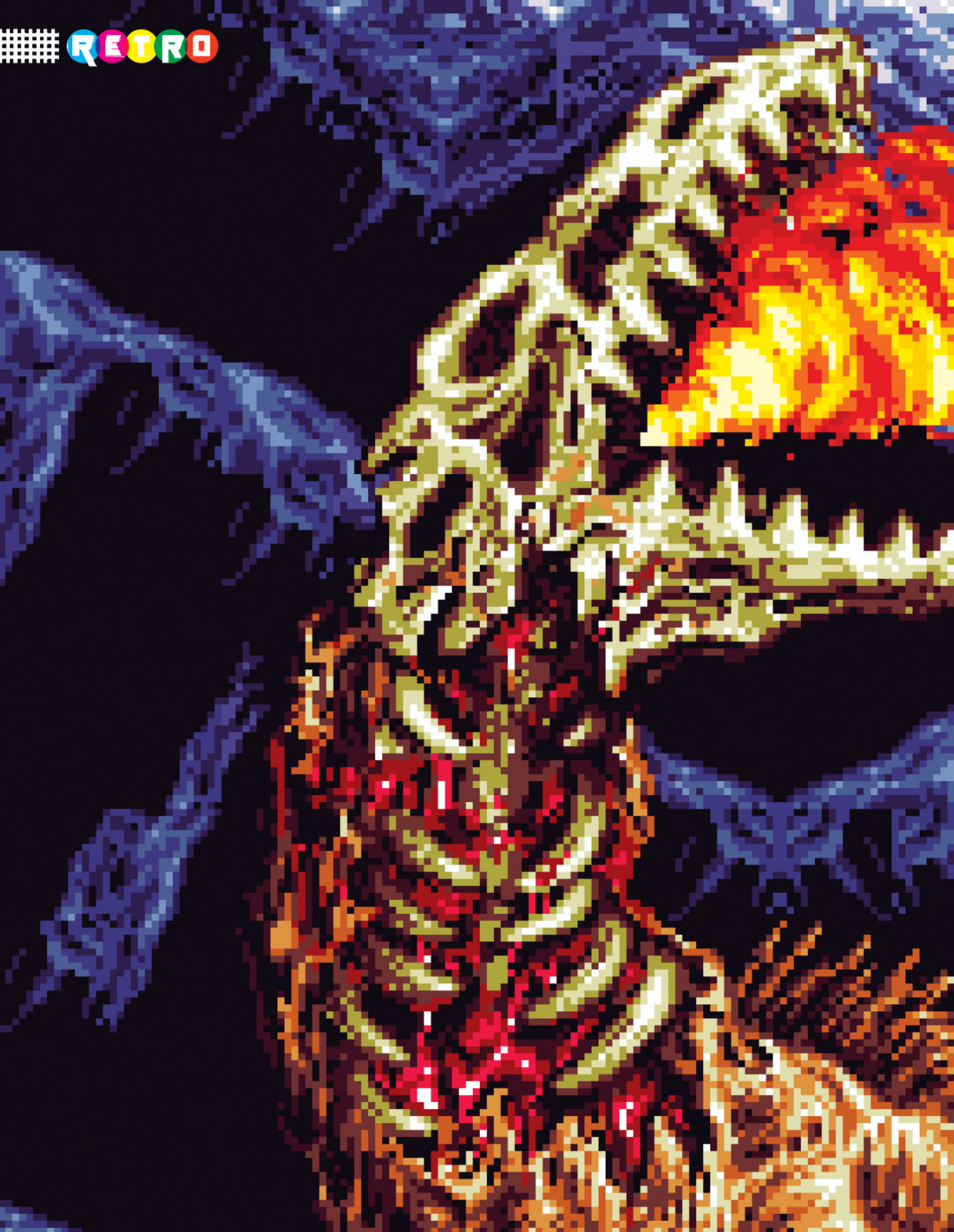
THE LIVING FOREST STAGE DEATH

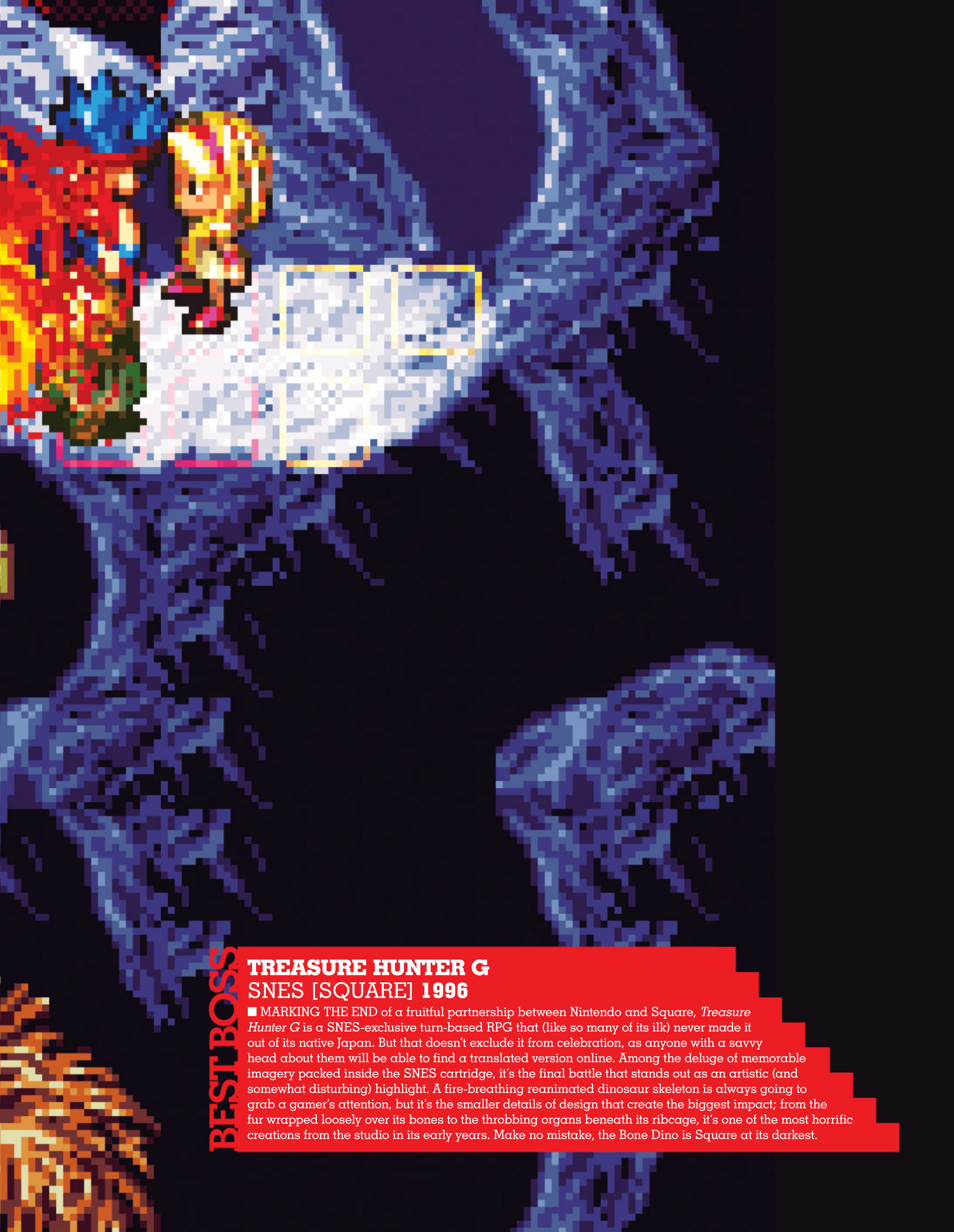
■ THE LIVING FOREST is a staple arena in the *Mortal Kombat* series now, after being introduced in the second game. But it took until the ninth instalment of the core series – which travelled to a very self-aware 'reboot' timeline – for the game to allow you to kick an opponent into the trees, getting them crunched to bits by splintery wooden teeth…



QUAN CHI'S NEW FATALITY

■ WE ONLY NEEDED to see mere snippets of *Mortal Kombat X* to get an idea of what to expect. The new graphics make all the blood and gore look more real than ever, and the result is some tremendously cringe-inducing fatalities. The worst so far? Quan Chi summons a dagger and drags his opponent onto it with his psychic powers, spins them round and splits their body in half.





BEST BOSS

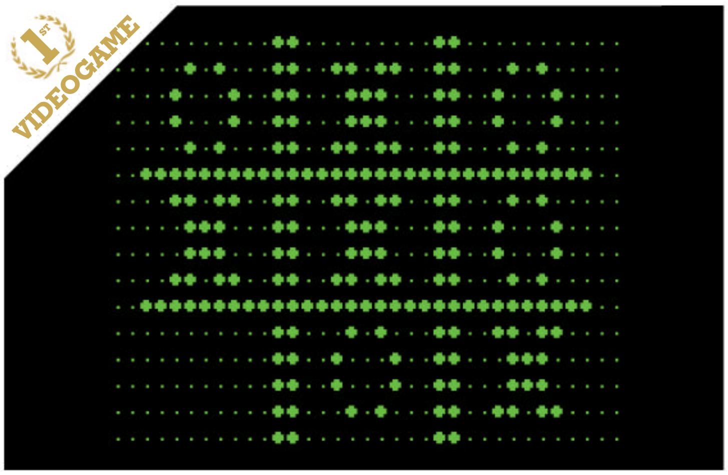
TREASURE HUNTER G

SNES [SQUARE] **1996**

■ MARKING THE END of a fruitful partnership between Nintendo and Square, *Treasure Hunter G* is a SNES-exclusive turn-based RPG that (like so many of its ilk) never made it out of its native Japan. But that doesn't exclude it from celebration, as anyone with a savvy head about them will be able to find a translated version online. Among the deluge of memorable imagery packed inside the SNES cartridge, it's the final battle that stands out as an artistic (and somewhat disturbing) highlight. A fire-breathing reanimated dinosaur skeleton is always going to grab a gamer's attention, but it's the smaller details of design that create the biggest impact; from the fur wrapped loosely over its bones to the throbbing organs beneath its ribcage, it's one of the most horrific creations from the studio in its early years. Make no mistake, the Bone Dino is Square at its darkest.

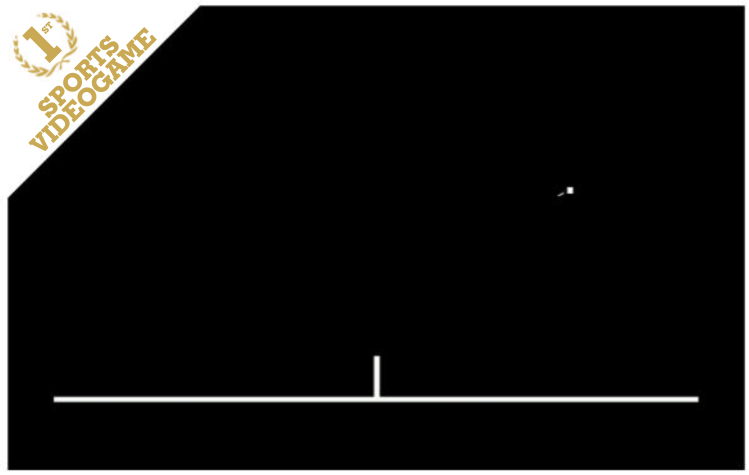
GAMING FIRSTS

WE LOOK BACK AT THE PIONEERING DEVELOPMENTS IN GAMES HISTORY, LEFT IN THE SHADOW OF THEIR SUCCESSFUL PEERS



OXO

THOUGH THERE HAD been precursors which used computer technology to play games, *OXO* is the first game to draw graphics on an electronic monitor as is fundamentally required of videogames – though it still utilised printed output in order to instruct the player and provide updates on the status of the current game. Written as part of Alexander S Douglas' PhD thesis, *OXO* employed a room-sized EDSAC computer at the University of Cambridge to play noughts and crosses, with moves entered on the dial of a rotary telephone. Impressively, the computer could play a full game without human aid.



TENNIS FOR TWO

DEVELOPED BY WILLIAM Higinbotham as a demonstration for visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory in the USA, *Tennis For Two* delivered on the promises of its title by allowing two players to play a simple simulation of tennis, which ran on a Donner Model 30 computer using an oscilloscope display. Though it looks similar to *Pong* in simulated screenshots, seeing it in action quickly reveals that the game is a surprisingly accurate side-on representation of the real sport. Utilising this viewpoint instead of the top-down one seen in *Pong* and its variants allows the game to simulate gravity, and it does so quite well – the ball arcs convincingly over the net as it's hit by the unseen players.

1952 1958 1962

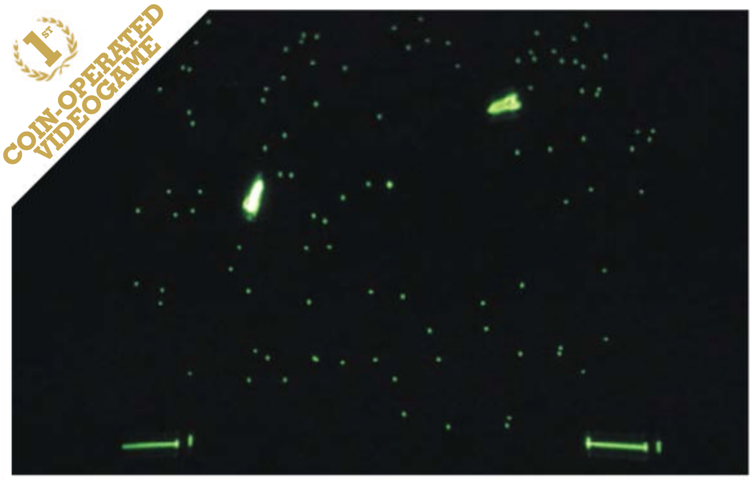


SPACEWAR!

CONCEIVED AS A way to demonstrate the power of the PDP-1 computer, *Spacewar!* was conceived by MIT students Steve Russell, Martin Graetz and Wayne Wiitanen. The game features two spaceships – each controlled by a single player – that must not only destroy each other but also avoid colliding with the star at the centre of the screen, which constantly influences movement with its gravitational pull. It's a relatively complex design, and was reportedly adopted by PDP-1 manufacturer DEC as a test program due to its extensive use of the hardware.

Aside from introducing the concept of destroying opponents with projectiles, the major legacy of *Spacewar!* lies in its status as the first videogame to receive wide distribution. The game was ported to other machines during the Sixties and served as an inspiration to other coders, who produced a variety of variations upon the game. Two of those would go on to be milestone developments in their own right, as we'll cover later.

1ST COIN-OPERATED VIDEOGAME



GALAXY GAME

A MERE NINE years after *Spacewar!* had been released, Bill Pitts and Hugh Tuck harnessed an incredibly expensive PDP-11/20 computer to allow Stanford University students the opportunity to play the game at their leisure. In doing so, they provided the world's first coin-operated game. At a price of 10 cents per game (or 25 cents for three), the hardware cost required the game to be played around 200,000 times to break even. That milestone was probably reached – the system was upgraded to handle multiple simultaneous games in 1972, and would remain a fixture on campus until technical issues retired it in 1979.

1ST VIDEOGAME CONSOLE



© Evan Amos

MAGNAVOX ODYSSEY

"BROWN BOX" MIGHT not be the most enticing codename of all time, but Ralph Baer's invention would bring videogames into the home for the first time ever. Prior to the release of the Odyssey, videogames had been confined exclusively to research facilities and the select few public places that bought *Computer Space*. Unlike later consoles which used programmable ROM cartridges, the Odyssey's cartridges connected jumpers and logic circuits to enable pre-programmed games. With limited graphical capabilities and no sound, players had to rely on screen overlays and keep score for themselves. Magnavox was acquired by Philips in 1974, and enjoyed enough success with the Odyssey to release a successor, known in North America as the Odyssey 2 and in Europe as the Philips Videopac G7000. The company left the console market during the 1983 market crash.

1971 1971 1972 1974

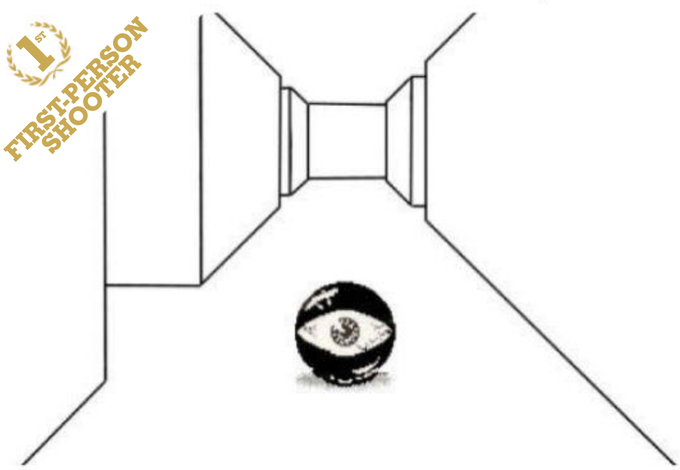
1ST COMMERCIALLY SOLD VIDEOGAME



COMPUTER SPACE

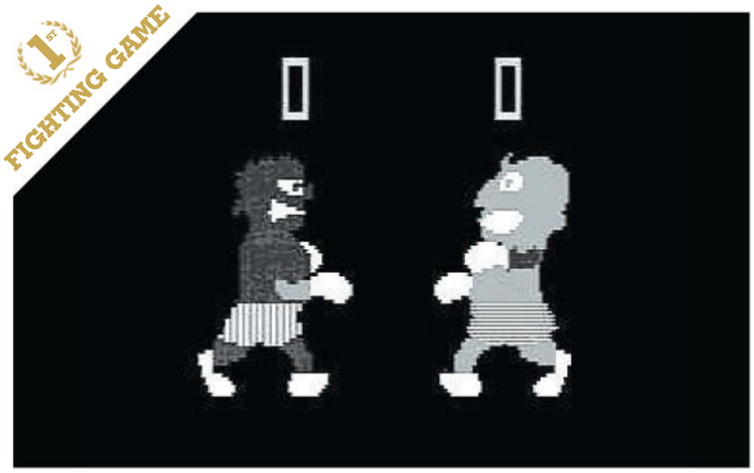
WHEN NUTTING ASSOCIATES released *Computer Space*, it became the first company to ever try to sell a videogame. *Computer Space* was an attempt to take the *Spacewar!* phenomenon and transplant it into commercial venues such as bars, where pinball tables and other coin-operated amusements had seen success. However, general audiences weren't familiar with the concept of videogames at all, and failed to grasp the game, which entailed controlling a rocket ship and avoiding enemy fire. Failure did not prove to be much of a deterrent – the designers of the game, Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney, went on to found a little company called Atari. You may have heard of it…

1ST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER



MAZE WAR

WHEN STEVE COLLEY decided that his maze navigation program was too dull, his solution would make him an unwitting pioneer of videogaming. *Maze War* took the first-person perspective of the maze program, and added the ability to see other users, represented as floating eyeballs, and shoot them. Movement was simple and tile-based, but it was indisputably a first-person shooter. What is astounding about *Maze War* is the sheer number of features it pioneered. It was the first networked game, offering peer-to-peer network gaming across a serial cable and later being adapted for play over ARPAnet, the forerunner to the internet. Crafty players also realised that their client versions of the software could be modified, thus allowing them to cheat.



HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP

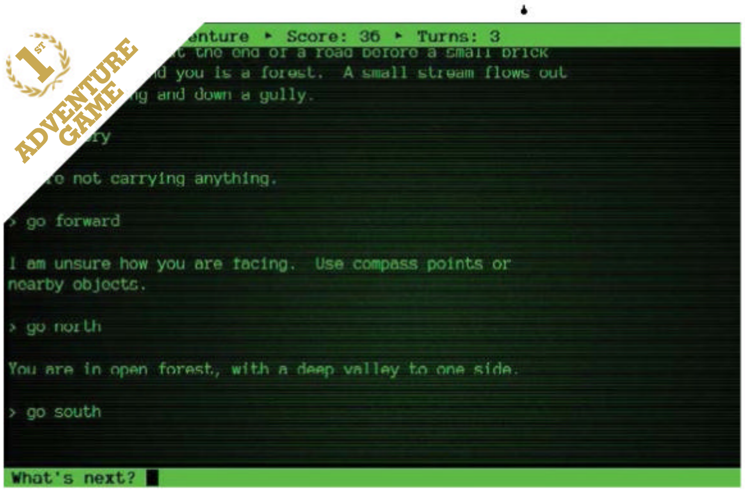
SOMETIMES, IT'S POSSIBLE to get something right the very first time. Such was the case with Sega's *Heavyweight Champ* – not only was it the first game to feature hand to hand combat, it introduced the common side-on perspective that has persisted through the genre's popularisation and subsequent move to 3D in the Nineties. Less enduring was the control system, which gave each player a boxing glove. These could be raised and lowered to determine the height of punches, and thrust inwards to strike. Confusingly, Sega would reuse the name for a 1987 arcade game and 1991 Master System game.



SPACE INVADERS

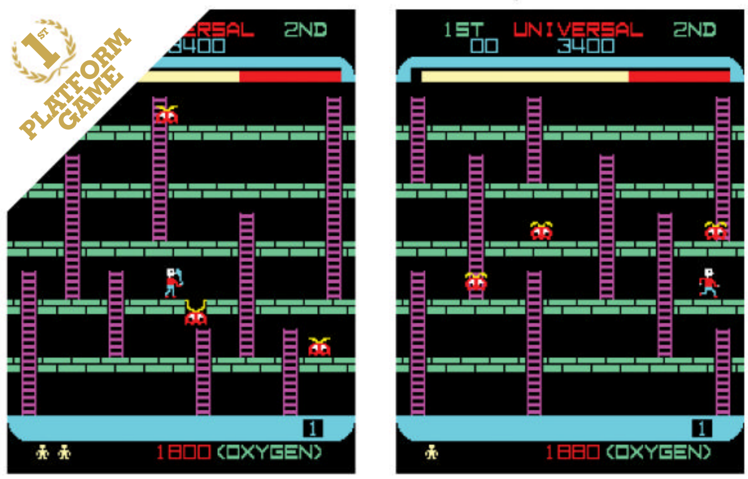
ONE OF ATARI'S key advantages over its rivals in the console market of the late Seventies and early Eighties was its ability to bring home the arcade games people loved. But when the *Space Invaders* phenomenon swept the world, it was Taito reaping the rewards – until Atari decided to break new ground by licensing the hit game. Proving the power of brand names, *Space Invaders* turned out to be the first killer app in console gaming. People didn't just buy the game – they were buying consoles just to play it, with the Atari 2600's sales reportedly quadrupling following the release of *Space Invaders*. Within a year of release, it surpassed two million sales – prior to that point, no stand-alone game had managed to even sell a million.

1976 1977 1980 1980



COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE

BORN OF WILL Crowther's desire to create a game to enjoy with his daughters, *Colossal Cave Adventure* reflects his background as a caver as well as a professional coder. The game featured some light fantasy elements, which would be ramped up when Don Woods discovered the game at Stanford University. Woods significantly expanded Crowther's original game, with more locations, a greater vocabulary and the inclusion of objects. Many games can trace their lineage back to *Colossal Cave Adventure*, thanks to its pioneering text adventure format and the inclusion of Tolkien-inspired creatures that tie the game to the emerging RPG genre.



SPACE PANIC

HERE'S AN INTERESTING fact for you: in Germany, platform games are typically called "jump and run" games. Amusing, as the first platform game didn't involve jumping at all. Universal's *Space Panic* doesn't allow the player to jump while they attempt to trap enemy aliens, but it does provide ladders to allow players to move between platforms – a common means of conveyance in early examples of the genre. Looking back at *Space Panic*, it's easy to be struck by the fact that genres can evolve from their early designs very quickly. Just a year after the game's release, *Donkey Kong* revolutionised the genre by allowing the player to jump between both static and moving platforms. As the result of Nintendo's monster hit, a platform game that doesn't involve jumping seems ridiculous today.

SOFTPORN ADVENTURE

1st VIDEOGAME TO FEATURE SEXUAL CONTENT

1981

WARFARE AND VIOLENCE came to videogames early, but sex came a little later. On-Line Systems' erotic text adventure was specifically marketed at adults only, but wasn't tremendously sophisticated – as you might expect from the game that inspired the creation of *Leisure Suit Larry*. The game was predictably controversial – it was largely ignored by the specialist press but highlighted by *TIME* magazine, causing hate mail to arrive at On-Line Systems. However the game also sold well, partially as a result of the controversy – reportedly, retailers would order other On-Line Systems games to mask the true intent of their orders.

COMMODORE VIC-20

1981

1st COMPUTER TO SELL A MILLION UNITS

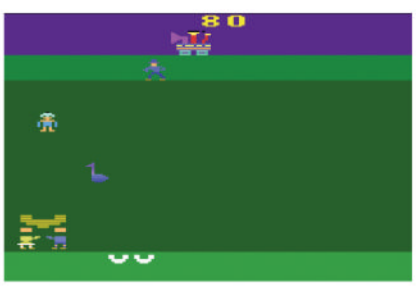


COMMODORE FOUNDER JACK Tramiel has been quoted as wanting to sell computers to the masses rather than the classes, and the VIC-20 was a breakthrough in achieving this. The machine was aggressively positioned at retail, being sold at an affordable price through discount retailers and toy stores, supported by adverts starring William Shatner which touted the machine's advantages over consoles. This ensured mass market success, while enthusiasts were drawn to the machine's surprisingly capable hardware. The VIC-20's success would signal the start of a process which saw stronger manufacturers pulling ahead, reducing the number of competitors in the hotly-contested Eighties home computer market. It was also the first widespread format that allowed users to create their own games, a prominent trend in Eighties gaming. It was a short-lived success, though – the VIC-20 was quietly discontinued in 1985 as it was eclipsed by its more popular successor, the Commodore 64.

1983

1st RELIGIOUS VIDEOGAME





THE MUSIC MACHINE

DEVELOPED BY SPARROW for the Atari 2600 and sold exclusively through Christian book stores, this game accompanied an LP of the same title and plays much like *Kaboom!*, an Activision hit of the era. Though it is an early example of an attempt to promote beliefs through a game, the religious message is relatively light-handed compared to later examples such as *Bible Adventures* – instead of catching bombs, you catch representations of qualities such as patience, faith and love. Due to the unusual distribution method, the game is now a rarity which fetches prices of up to $5,000 at auction.

FALSE FIRSTS

The hardware and software wrongly credited with pioneering achievements

PONG

False Achievement: First videogame



Pong is very definitely not the first ever videogame – Atari's Nolan Bushnell has stated on record that he had seen a similar game running on the Magnavox Odyssey, though he claims not to have thought much of it. However, *Pong* is still very much the game that launched an industry – though it wasn't the first commercially released videogame, it was the first commercially successful one.

ATARI 5200

False Achievement: First console to use analogue sticks as standard



While every home console since the Nintendo 64 has included an analogue control stick as standard, they had been used sporadically since the early Eighties. The Atari 5200 was the first high profile console to use such a device, but an earlier example is known: the 1292 Advanced Programmable Video System, designed in 1976 by German manufacturer Radofin, licensed throughout Europe.

GAME BOY

False Achievement: First handheld console



When handheld gaming finally came of age in 1989, Nintendo was there leading the charge with the Game Boy. But while the primitive technology can fool players into thinking it was a pioneer, the real beginning came in 1979 with Milton Bradley's Microvision, a handheld console featuring interchangeable cartridges. The black and white LCD screen, the most commonly malfunctioning part of the system, had a very low resolution of 16 x 16.

NINTENDO 64

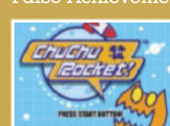
False Achievement: First console to include four controller ports



While it was nice to enjoy *GoldenEye 007* and *Mario Kart 64* without having to dig out a multitap, Nintendo's console wasn't the first to allow more than two players to compete. The Atari 5200 had four ports in the early Eighties, and prior to that the Bally Astrocade introduced the feature. The long-forgotten pioneer was developed in 1976 by Midway, then the videogames division of Bally Manufacturing.

CHUCHU ROCKET

False Achievement: First online console game



While the Dreamcast was the first console to support online play out of the box, modem peripherals had been available for many years prior – even the Atari 2600 had such an item, though it wasn't used for competitive gaming. The XBAND modem, released for the SNES and Mega Drive in 1994, was the first such peripheral to offer competitive console gaming and did so across a variety of titles.

GAME CHANGERS

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Released: 15 July, 2003 **Publisher:** LucasArts **Developer:** BioWare **System:** PC, Xbox



The original draft for the game stated that you could permanently lose squad members, but this was later removed for the sake of making the game more 'fun'

Everyone has fantasised about being a Jedi or Sith. In 2003, BioWare and LucasArts made that a reality – letting us live out our Star Wars dream

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS Of The Old Republic was ground-breaking for two major reasons – firstly, the game proved what a videogame could do with the *Star Wars* property: it wasn't just some cynical licensed cash-in (something that was expected back in the early Noughties). It was also, at the time of release, a cutting edge RPG – back in 2003, taking up 4GB on a hard-drive was unheard of. But it wasn't just a necessity for BioWare to use this much memory – it was also a statement of intent.

Knights Of The Old Republic was one of the deepest RPGs ever made at the time of release. It also added depth to other genres; there were sections of the game that relied on tactical third-person shooting and even first-person shooting areas, too. BioWare took the real-time combat popularised by MMORPGs and applied the mechanics to the single-player RPG, resulting in a unique half-turn based, half-real time hybrid that BioWare has since perfected across the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* franchises.

The idea behind this wholly new approach to combat was to channel the inherent cinematography that came with the *Star Wars* franchise and gamify it; making encounters fast and action-oriented, every encounter similar to something you'd see Lucas himself orchestrate. It helped that BioWare and LucasArts had a very fluid and understanding relationship – considering how precious LucasArts could be about its property, BioWare has gone on record as saying 'very little' of its initial content was changed. High praise indeed for a licensed game.

The game was noted for its technical achievements – BioWare chose the Xbox as the game's leading platform because of its compatibility with the PC

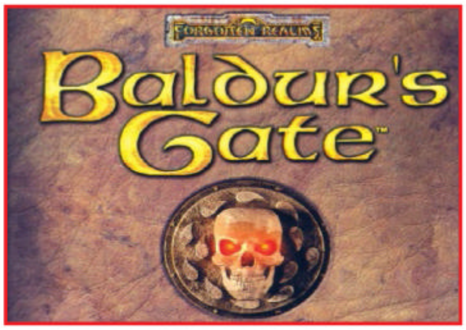
THE ANATOMY OF KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A WEALTH OF OTHER RPGS, BUT WHAT INSPIRED THE GAME IN THE FIRST PLACE?



STAR WARS RPG

★ Wizards of the Coast's d20-based roleplaying game was a *Dungeons & Dragons* inspired tabletop game that required players to choose a certain class at the beginning of a story and then work together to progress in the game…seem slightly familiar?



BALDUR'S GATE

★ BioWare's previous games formed the foundations on which *Knights Of The Old Republic* would later be built – the iconic combat system actually started out as an exact carbon copy of Baldur's Gates strategically-centred mechanic before adjustments were made.



DEUS EX

★ The development team looked towards the revolutionary *Deus Ex* for inspiration to see how a game could make the player think about all the multiple paths its protagonist could take through a single level, and apply a roster's worth of skills to solve the puzzle.

(which BioWare was already well-versed in, thanks to *Neverwinter Nights*) and because the studio could achieve its vision of a huge, open world on the console. It was a vision that was well achieved; by the time the game shipped, it had grass that reacted to real-time wind, reactive dust on Tatooine and sand that remembers a player's footsteps – all of which were ground-breaking on console.

■■■ THE GAME WAS also the first in the industry to weave a proper morality scale into the gameplay – the choices offered to us moved beyond the end-game 'kill or save *everyone*' options offered in action-RPGs before (with, perhaps, the exception of *Deus Ex*). *Knights Of The Old Republic* took that design philosophy to its logical conclusion; BioWare's seminal RPG had iterative decisions that affected the events in the story at pre-defined beats throughout the narrative, beats that were less binary than the law, chaos or neutral paths offered in Japanese alternatives on the market.

> **IT WAS AN RPG ANYONE COULD ENJOY – FROM WEATHERED ROLE PLAYERS TO FRESH-EYED STAR WARS FANS**

KEY FACTS

■ Jennifer Hale – who voiced the female protagonist – would go on to have a very lucrative relationship with BioWare, eventually voicing the female Shepard in the *Mass Effect* trilogy.

■ Each selectable class in-game is based on a leading *Star Wars* character – Bounty Hunter (Boba Fett), Sorcerer (Darth Sidious), Jedi Knight (Luke Skywalker) and Smuggler (Han Solo) to name just a few.

■ The PC version's additional location, NPCs and weapons were ultimately added to console via Xbox Live.

But what's the point in making us choose how we want the game to play out if we don't feel like we have a stake in the world? Enter BioWare's biggest strength: character development. It helped that *Knights Of The Old Republic* had the *Star Wars* universe to provide an elaborate backdrop, but BioWare was smart – it chose to delve into an undeveloped part of Lucas' lore, some 4000 years before the events of what would become *Episode I*.

This allowed the developers to establish its own world, replete with countless opportunities to tamper with *Star Wars* lore for its own ends. This lead to characters on both the Dark and Light sides that were fully fleshed out and *human*, something that RPGs had rarely managed to do before. It helped that each main character was fully voice acted, and acted *well*, too; each reaction and response to the player's actions catered and specifically directed to suit your alignment. This was a labour of love at LucasArts and BioWare – the voice recording took over a month of *solid* work, with actors recording throughout the day and night over five weeks to get enough lines to account for the game's non-linear structure.

The result of this ambitious and multi-faceted approach was a watershed moment for Western development – during the early 2000s, there was a rebellion against the stagnating RPG scene that was starting to congeal in Japan. BioWare came along and proved the RPG didn't have to be hidden behind walls of text and inaccessible menus, spikey-haired protagonists and battles with God: this was an RPG anyone could enjoy – from weathered dice-wielding role players to fresh-eyed *Star Wars* fans. BioWare changed the world – it doesn't take a Jedi to see that.



GAME CHANGERS

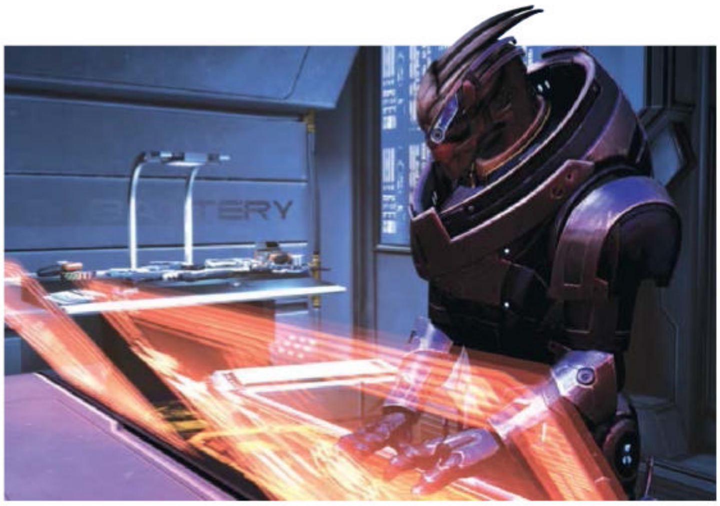
8 OF BIOWARE'S MOST MEMORABLE COMPANIONS

BIOWARE MAY HAVE CARVED OUT A NICHE WITH ITS WELL-REALISED CHARACTERS IN KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC, BUT THEY WEREN'T THE FIRST (OR LAST) GREAT PERSONAS THEY WOULD CRAFT



HK-47

■ HK-47 IS A Hunter-Killer assassin droid made by the Dark Sith Lord, Darth Revan in *KOTOR*. His memory wiped, he's a nomadic sociopath – a misanthropic machine motivated by a desire for chaos, and an irrational hatred of organic life. His idea of love, for example, is "making a shot to the knees of a target 120 kilometres away using an Aratech sniper rifle with a tri-light scope."



GARRUS VAKARIAN

■ GARRUS HAS THE outward appearance of a cold, hard killer. Like most Turians, he was trained in all aspects of military combat by the age of 15. But a love for the order of things lead him to the police force, where he meets your character in the first *Mass Effect*. Here, you slowly unravel the enigma that is Garrus – the confident, loyal and mostly untainted *good* force in the *Mass Effect* galaxy.



MINSC

■ THE HULKING TATTOOED ranger is passable on his own, but it's his odd pet – Boo – that makes Minsc endearing. The 'miniature giant space hamster' lets Minsc express himself in an unself-conscious way by chatting nonsense to his pet. In *Baldur's Gate II*, BioWare gave him motivation, making him even more empathetic.



VARRIC

■ ONE OF GAMING'S most endearing rascals, Varric is an important *Dragon Age* character due to his unique placement as a narrator. Yes, he likes to elaborate, and yes, he likes to lace his stories with a little self-aggrandising pomp, but he's a good friend to your protagonist and, beneath it all, has a heart of gold.



MISSION VAO

■ THE STREET URCHIN turned Ebon Hawk crew mate, Mission was a uniquely damaged Twi'lek in *KOTOR* – she's got a sunny disposition despite a history of abandonment. Her relationship with Wookie Zaalbar, is reminiscent of Han's relationship with Chewbacca – and that's sure of getting into our hearts.



THANE KRIOS

■ THANE IS AN assassin, but makes each assassination intimate, memorable. He's got a photographic memory that lets him relive each of his kills in detail – not helping his intense guilt complex. Oh, and he's terminally ill, giving his whole arc a definitive ending that's emotionally crippling by the end of *Mass Effect 3*.



DR. LIARA T'SONI

■ BIOWARE ONCE AGAIN shows its ability to infuse characters with unique personalities with Liara – it would've been so easy to reduce her to being *Mass Effect*'s science-toting hippy pacifist, but that's just boring. Rather, Liara has serious mummy issues, with a wistful naivety and confused feelings towards humanity. She made you want to be a better Spectre in the game, and a better human.



ALISTAIR

■ IN A WORLD as brutal as *Dragon Age*'s, it's important to have someone to provide a little comic relief. Luckily, Alistair has this incredible gift for relieving the tension when you most need it. It's like he can surgically deliver the most reassuring line on a whim, always with a self-aware smile. He's like *Dragon Age*'s big brother figure; it's a shame he isn't quite fit to be ruler of the kingdom, isn't it?

WHY I ♥...

The Secret Of Monkey Island

JAMES GOLDING, LEAD ENGINE PROGRAMMER (UNREAL), EPIC

"*My favourite game ever is* The Secret Of Monkey Island *– it's such a great mix of clever mechanics and intelligent design. It's funny, too, which a lot of games weren't back then. It wasn't ever trying to beat you, either, just entertain you. I think there's only one way to die throughout the whole game – it was about playing it, rather than it playing you. It felt like such a complete world, too, and few games have made such a compelling and complete fantasy world as that did. I will still find myself humming the music to myself, too, years later. Everything about it just invited you to come and play, and not a lot of games have that any more.*"





"It felt like such a complete world, and few games have made such a compelling and complete fantasy world as Monkey Island did"

JAMES GOLDING, LEAD ENGINE PROGRAMMER (UNREAL), EPIC



RETRO INTERVIEW

JANE JENSEN

Her Gabriel Knight adventure games stood out in the Nineties for their dark, layered stories and mature themes. Two decades later, Jane Jensen's Schattenjäger re-emerges from the shadows

Jane Jensen was an aspiring writer and adventure game fan when a short story she wrote caught the eye of a hiring manager at Sierra On-Line. She went on to become one of Sierra's renowned game designers, responsible for a trilogy of supernatural mystery adventures starring the roguish Gabriel Knight—a wannabe novelist turned Shadow Hunter—and his cynical assistant and sometimes love interest, Grace Nakamura. Though she kept making games after Sierra's 1999 shutdown, *Gabriel Knight* remains the prolific writer/designer's best-known work. With the release of the *Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers 20th Anniversary Edition* putting her beloved Schattenjäger back in the spotlight, we caught up with Jane to talk about her career highlights and where she hopes to take Gabriel and Grace from here.

You'd been at Sierra a few years when co-founder Roberta Williams suggested you pitch your own game—*Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers*. How was that development different to your work so far?

When I first started at Sierra, I was hired to be part of the writer's block. We were told, "You'll never be a designer, don't have that ambition, don't get yourself stressed about it because that's never going to happen." Just sit here and write dialogue and shut up, basically. [laughs] But that's not the way it worked out.

I had a huge sense of ambition and passion [on *Gabriel Knight I*]. It was my chance and I really, really wanted to be a game designer. We had a passionate team and we were just really cranking on it. The game I did previously was *King's Quest VI*, which I co-designed with Roberta, and I was basically the one who was in the office every day, cranking out the "look" dialogue and stuff like that. So *Gabriel Knight* wasn't vastly different in terms of what I actually had to do, but because this was my own thing, and it was a darker, more mature story, and it was a more in-depth story, I cared about it a lot. I was very anxious to see it turn out well.

At what point did you know *Sins Of The Fathers* would be a hit?

We had taken the first day on floppy disk as a demo to E3. We got such a positive reaction to that, and by the time we shipped we got a magazine cover from Computer Gaming World, we'd sent out a preview build that had gotten really good buzz. So we kind of knew by the time it shipped that it was a successful title, and I pretty much rolled right on to *Gabriel Knight 2*.

I HAD HUGE AMBITION AND PASSION. GABRIEL KNIGHT WAS MY CHANCE AND I REALLY, REALLY WANTED TO BE A GAME DESIGNER

How did the vibe at Sierra change throughout development of the *Gabriel Knight* series?

At the time that I started at Sierra, [the company] was really at its peak. After *GK1*, Sierra as a whole started waning a bit. A



DEVELOPER COMMENTS

JANE ON GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN



■■■ I WENT TO the studio and watched them filming some of [Sierra's first FMV game] *Phantasmagoria*, when I was just starting to write the *Gabriel Knight 2* design. I was much more conscious of the fact that these characters had to be something a real actor could play. The dialogue had to be really good because there were going to be live people standing there and saying my lines—if it was bad I would feel terrible! So I was thinking of it more like a movie script, but we'd had really good voice over actors for *GK1* as well, so that game was already more acted out than novel-like. I had those [voices] in my head when I wrote the script for *GK2*.

JANE ON MOEBIUS: EMPIRE RISING



■■■ ON *MOEBIUS*, IT was nice working with a team [Phoenix Online] who were really into adventure games and who in general were very cooperative, trying to do anything that I wanted to do. I really like how cinematic it is, and the voiceover production was great, I love the actors. So all of that was really positive. The difficult part was the stress of managing the project. I've always been the designer and creative director, I've never really had to worry about budget and schedule and cracking the whip over the team, and we did have a very low amount of money. *GK1* was like a million dollars in 1993, and we ended up having like $390k for *Moebius*. It's a lot harder than you think it is, let's put it that way. I didn't foresee how much time it would take to do all the other roles and how much I would not enjoy that.



"*Gray Matter*'s second development team was in Paris, and they had amazing artists," Jane recalls. "They'd send me concept art and it was just like, wow. Probably the best art I've ever had on a game."



lot of that was trying to figure out, "What is the next big thing? How do we get ahead of the curve?" With the FMV [of *Gabriel Knight 2*], and then the real-time 3D [of *Gabriel Knight 3*], the company itself was trying to figure out, "How do we stay on top of the heap?" And eventually it was clear that adventure games weren't going to accomplish that.

When did you realise that *Gabriel Knight 3* would be the last of the series?

It was a struggle throughout that project. We had a lot of turnover on the team. It was three years in development, at least, and it just didn't feel like the team was that excited. I think I had three different producers over the course of the project, people coming and going. There were individual people who were Sierra adventure game fans who were into it, but as a whole it felt like dragging a boulder up a hill.

And it was clear to me, the last year or so of working on it, that I was the only real Sierra designer left. I was kind of like the last dinosaur. The other teams were doing totally different things, shooters or whatever, and *GK3* was the last adventure game project. It was sort of a fizzle, because at the end it was just bug-pounding on various platforms and I stopped going into the office. I had signed off on the content and the producer was basically just trying to get the technology working correctly and the bugs fixed. It seemed to be months of waiting for it to ship. And then it did, and that was it. There was never a day that was like, "Goodbye Jane, here's your gold watch, thanks for being with Sierra On-Line." I just never went back, and they never called.



In *Moebius: Empire Rising*, paranoid genius Malachi Rector gets mixed up in a global conspiracy dating back to the Roman Empire.

Did you think there would ever be another *Gabriel Knight* game?

I thought it was over. After that I worked on a couple of novels, *Millennium Rising* and *Dante's Equation*, so after *GK3* shipped I figured that was the end of the adventure game part of my life and I'd be doing writing on other stuff.

How did you get back into the industry?

It was probably three years later, I got involved with a company doing casual games [Oberon Media]. This was pretty early on—there was Big Fish Games, and *Bejeweled* had just come out, but this was before hidden object games. So it was a brand new market, and it was clear from the statistics that it was a heavily female market. Strategically I was thinking if I could establish this company, then long-term we could do adventure games and this would be a good audience for it. Because one of the things that was clear to me about the industry was that big publishers were mainly making games for that 18-25 year old male market, and that wasn't an adventure game audience.

How did you know that?

The last E3 I went to, it was all Stormtroopers and girls in bikinis, and it was like, these guys don't care about *Gabriel Knight*. This is really a generalisation, but in general if you offer an 18-year-old guy a choice between *Tomb Raider*, or *King's Quest*, or *Gabriel Knight*, he's not going to be choosing the adventure game. And even on *Gabriel Knight* I had gotten a lot of feedback from people saying, "I played this with my girlfriend and she loved it." It seemed like I was getting letters like that constantly, telling me that it was particularly interesting to the female audience.

What games did you make at Oberon?

I did a couple of puzzle games and then the hidden object genre started. I was always trying to get in more story and more adventure gameplay, like inventory items and dialogue and things like that.

Did your hunch about the audience turn out to be true?

It's definitely true, if you look at hidden object games now, they have a lot of [adventure game] elements. Ours were some of the first games to do that, in that genre. The problem is it's a really tough market… it was mostly price issues, because Big Fish Games has the corner



Jane's casual game series *Dr. Lynch: Grave Secrets* evolved from an idea she had at Sierra: "It was an Agatha Christie-ish, cozy British mystery with this hyper-cynical, skeptic guy who was debunking this supposedly haunted archeology site."

on that market, they had dropped the price to $6.99 or even lower, there's a new one coming out every day, and we never had enough sales to increase the budget. So yes, I think that audience is very receptive to more story and more adventure gameplay, the difficulty is that the games in that market are so disposable.

Your first post-Sierra adventure game was 2010's *Gray Matter*. What was that development like?
It was the first time I'd done something completely different to *Gabriel Knight* in an adventure game and I was pleased with the design. We were working with a German publisher [dtp entertainment AG], because they were one of the only publishers who would even fund an adventure game at that point. I was happy to have somebody willing to fund and produce the project. It was a really difficult process—it started out with *Dreamcatcher*, and they cancelled it, and it was picked up by this little Czech team, and that producer got the dtp producer interested, and dtp moved it to one of their teams in Paris, and it just went through a lot of roadblocks like that. Ultimately, because of all that stuff, we didn't have a lot of money to finish the project, so that was stressful at the end. I was talking to those guys remotely and not super-involved with that production.

In 2012 you returned to adventure game development by starting your own indie studio Pinkerton Road. What prompted you to go to Kickstarter?
I was working for Zynga at the time, and on the side we [Jane and her husband, Robert Holmes] were doing the *Lola & Lucy* iPad app [a kids' ebook], and thinking eventually we'd like to have our own little company doing apps and smaller games. I was having some frustration at Zynga because the game I was working on was supposed to have a story, and they'd hired me specifically to do a story, but some of the people I was working with were like, "Why does it need a story? How do you tell a story? We can't have people talk"—it was really frustrating. The guys I was working with were having a hard time visualising a story of any kind. I just felt like, "You know what, I'm tired of explaining why there should be a story. I just want to do an adventure game."

When Tim Schafer did his Kickstarter and it was so successful, that sort of changed things, because originally we'd thought, "We'll do this little company, we'll get *Lola & Lucy* out, maybe that'll give us enough money that I can quit my job"— thinking about this as a longer-term process of building this little company. And then we realised that if we did a Kickstarter we might be able to fund a real adventure game and do it all a lot faster. So we took the plunge. At the time it felt like if we didn't do it quickly then the window would close, because there were probably going to be a lot of other adventure game projects coming to Kickstarter, and it seemed that the interest would die off pretty quickly.

THERE'S A LOVE STORY, AND THERE'S THESE MURDERS, AND THERE'S VOODOO... ALL OF THOSE THEMES ARE TIMELESS

How do you feel about that in hindsight?
I would change how we went about it. When we first went up [on Kickstarter], we offered people a choice of games, and we didn't have a demo or anything. We got a lot of feedback on the campaign that it wasn't specific enough, and we ended up promising all kinds of crazy stuff. If I were to do it again I would do it much differently. At the end of the day, it helped us get *Moebius* out and it helped us start our studio, so I can't say that I regret doing it necessarily. But it was way, way, way more difficult and stressful—not only during the campaign, but also during the product development—than I ever anticipated.

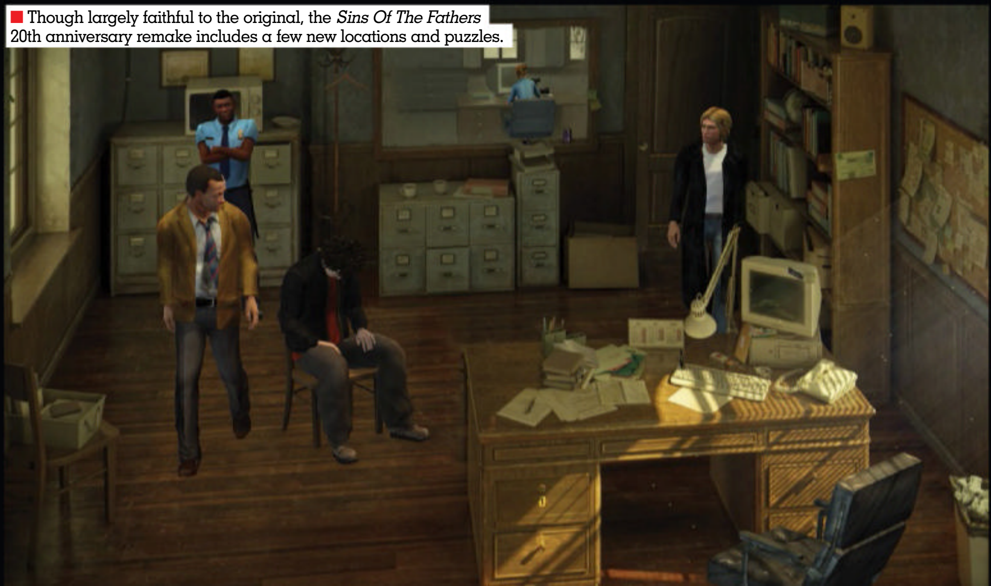

Sins Of The Fathers has more than 7,000 lines of dialogue. "Even when I'm writing straight fiction, I always take a pass and read it out loud. I think dialogue's always better if it's speakable and realistic," Jane says.

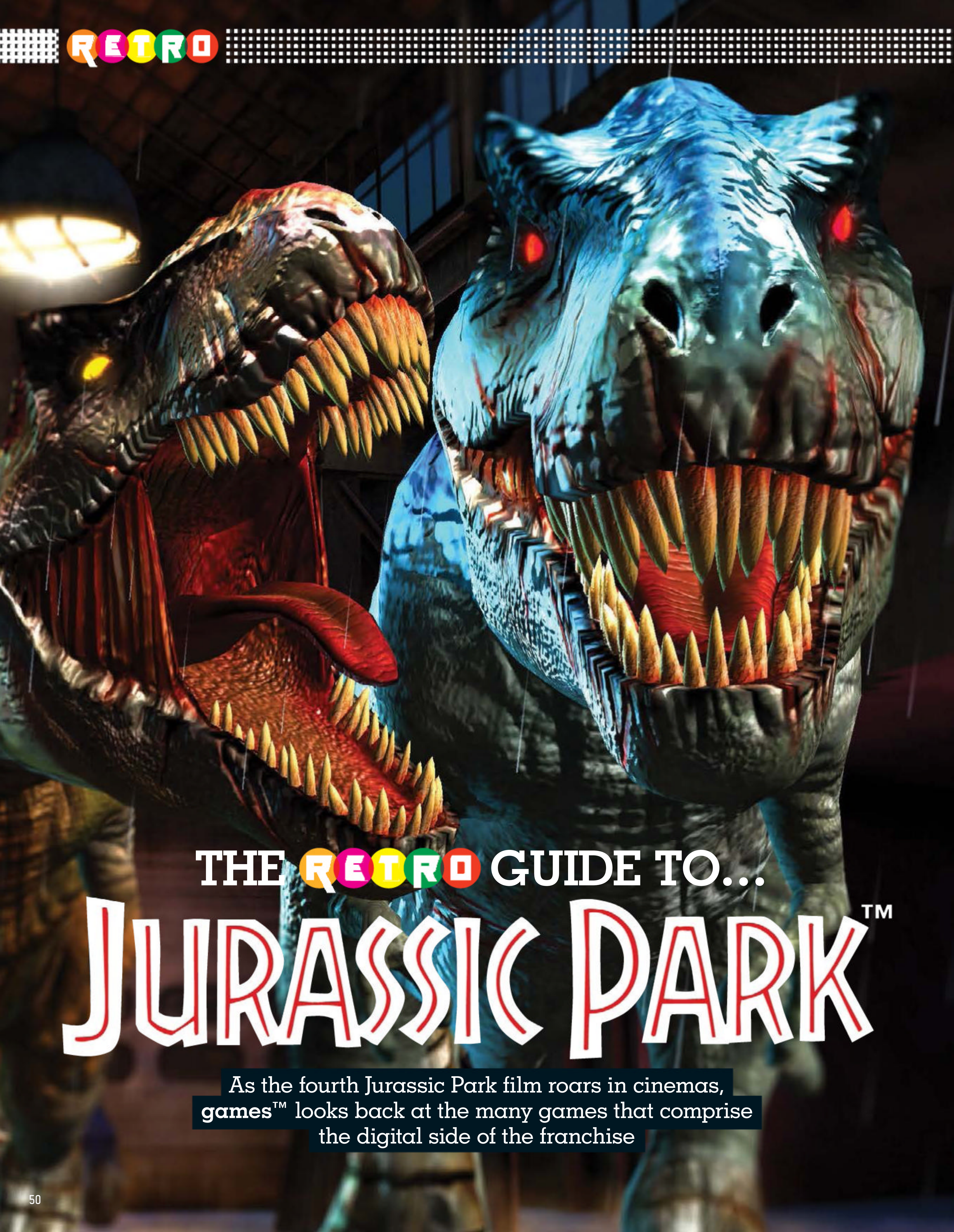
During the Kickstarter, you and Activision (the owner of Sierra's old properties) reached an agreement for *Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers 20th Anniversary Edition*. How did that happen?
Activision contacted me. I don't know if that would have happened if I hadn't been out there on Kickstarter and very visible. Basically, the Telltale games and the growing casual market, the growing female audience, Double Fine's Kickstarter—I think all of that made certain people at Activision interested in possibly doing something with adventure games again.

Why a remake? Would you have preferred to do a new *Gabriel Knight* game?
Initially my interest was in doing *GK4*, but I think Activision made a good argument that *GK1* was always the pilot episode. It explained who Gabriel is and how he got to be that way, so remaking that for a new era was a great idea, and hopefully would enable us to kick off a new round of the franchise and more new stories.

What do you like about the *Sins Of The Fathers* remake, compared to the original?
I love the graphics. It feels so much higher resolution—very New Orleans and very atmospheric, I think it looks really beautiful. It has a nice mood to it.

Are there things about it that make you think, "That's so Nineties"?
Really just the setting. [The characters have] huge CRT monitors. In *Moebius*, the character's smartphone was a major part of the UI, and we obviously can't have any of that in *Gabriel Knight*. I'm definitely aware of the period that we're writing in, but the story itself really holds up well. I don't think it feels dated, particularly. There's a love story, and there's these murders, and there's voodoo, and there's this whole family thing, and I think all those themes are timeless.


Though largely faithful to the original, the *Sins Of The Fathers* 20th anniversary remake includes a few new locations and puzzles.



THE RETRO GUIDE TO… JURASSIC PARK™

As the fourth Jurassic Park film roars in cinemas, **games™** looks back at the many games that comprise the digital side of the franchise

FILM LICENCES CAN be tricky things to master. Some developers feel that they can release a half-hearted product, safe in the knowledge that fans will buy the game regardless, while others attempt to take the licence in new and exciting directions, directions fitting for a videogame. Needless to say, most licences are a mixed bag, mainly because the games themselves are often handled by multiple developers across several different time periods.

In this respect, *Jurassic Park* is no different and it has its fair share of great and terrible games. You might not realise, however, that among its park simulators, quite a few genres have been explored over the years, from platformers to real-time strategy games. Join us then as we look back at the titles that have spawned from Universal's billion-dollar franchise.





JURASSIC PARK 1993

NES/GAME BOY

Ocean Software was the king of movie conversions, so it should come as no surprise to learn it secured the coveted licence for Nintendo and home computer systems. Cleverly, it tailored the games around each system, so the NES and Game Boy outings are enjoyable top-down shooters split into standalone levels, while the others are distinctly different. Alan Grant must run around the park shooting or collecting eggs, which will then turn into access cards (don't ask). He's then able to access buildings and interact with the various park terminals. The Game Boy version follows the same principles, but is greatly cut down in size.



JURASSIC PARK 1993

SNES

The SNES version utilises the same top-down view as its eight-bit cousins but is a slightly slower-paced game with a greater emphasis on exploration and a huge open world. It also zooms in on the screen a little more, which can occasionally make it hard to avoid enemies. A few puzzles have been thrown into the mix, but they're relatively easy, requiring little effort to solve. Much harder is avoiding the solid array of enemies that range from the ever-dangerous raptors, to giant dragonflies and the T-Rex. Perhaps the biggest and best change is found with the new mode 7 sections, which switches the action to 3D whenever you explore the game's facilities.



JURASSIC PARK 1993

AMIGA/PC

The home computer versions play like a cross between Ocean's console games. It has more elaborate puzzles than the SNES game, dingier visuals (that suit the oppressive atmosphere quite well) and several new dinosaurs. The AGA version is the best Amiga outing thanks to smoother visuals in the 3D sections.



A QUICK INTERVIEW WITH GARY BRACEY

Ocean's manager on going after Jurassic Park

Why were different versions made for different systems?
We wanted to have a *Doom*-style section in the game, but a number of the systems weren't technically capable, so we tried to make appropriate levels for the relevant platforms.

How difficult was the licence to secure in comparison with other films?
Not too difficult. Ocean already had commercial credibility in Hollywood so they were happy for us to bid for the game rights… and we paid a shitload of money for them. I think it was the first million-dollar (advance) game licence but we were so confident of the film's potential success it was a calculated gamble. We also met with Spielberg himself as I think he wanted reassurance that the company would do creative justice to the IP. That was a fun meeting!

Why do some games share plot points with the book?
I don't recall exactly which parts you're referring to, but if we found something in the book that we felt would make a good game mechanic, we used it.

How successful was the game in the end?
Enormously. I don't know how entirely happy we all were with the game itself but the company had made such a significant investment in the licence that it just had to be released to tie in with the movie launch, hence we had the usual narrow development time and inevitable crunch period. If we had been given another six months it could have been amazing. Still, not bad.

JURASSIC PARK 1993

MEGA DRIVE

Sega won the licence for its home systems and again made different versions that played to the strengths of each console. The Mega Drive version is particularly intriguing as it's effectively two games in one. One half sees you playing Alan Grant, the other, a hungry raptor. While both use plenty of platforming, the raptor section has a focus on combat, while Grant must rely on some underpowered weapons. It looks a little dowdy, but it proves surprisingly entertaining, if a little hard in places.





JURASSIC PARK 1993

MASTER SYSTEM/GAME GEAR

Sega's eight-bit versions allow you to tackle levels however you wish and typically comprise of two parts. The first has you in a Jeep, shooting down enemies with an on-screen cursor, while the second half is more run-and-gun based, with Alan Grant racing through the stages. It's pretty tough at times but the solid level design and interesting range of dinos ensures you'll fight on until the end.







JURASSIC PARK 1993

MEGA-CD

This is arguably Sega's best home conversion of the hit licence. It takes the form of an engrossing point-and-click adventure that proves you don't need spills and thrills to create an engrossing game. As with previous games you're hunting for dinosaur eggs, but there are far more puzzle elements to be found. You have panoramic views of the island and multiple paths are available, meaning it's easy to get lost. Everything takes place against a strict 11-hour time limit, which adds to the general tension and provides an interesting change of pace for Sega's quirky adventure.



JURASSIC PARK 1994

ARCADE

Sega's arcade game shares very little in common with its movie namesake, but that doesn't really matter. It starts off with a thrilling chase that has you pursued by the T-Rex and doesn't let up for the rest of its running time. Along the way you'll fend off hordes off rampaging dinosaurs, tear through all manner of different environments and even race along the back of a brachiosaur. It's an insane, ridiculous treat that impresses with beautifully drawn dinosaurs and plenty of variety. The lack of weapons is a disappointment, and the choice of a joystick over a more traditional lightgun seems odd, but you'll be having so much fun it doesn't really matter.

"EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE AGAINST A STRICT 11-HOUR TIME LIMIT"



JURASSIC PARK 2: THE CHAOS CONTINUES 1994

SNES

Ocean's sequel has nothing to do with either movie and takes the form of a *Contra*-styled run-and-gun. Sadly, while it allows you to tackle levels in any order and caters for two players (complete with a clever health sharing mechanic) it's too difficult for its own good.





JURASSIC PARK 2: THE CHAOS CONTINUES 1994

GAME BOY

Ocean's handheld outing is far more successful. It's another run-and-gun but with far more interesting mechanics (you can swim for starters) and cute stylised visuals. Keys must be collected before you can leave a level, and as the game progresses the stage layouts get ever more complex. Highly recommended, although it's now hard to find.

JURASSIC PARK INTERACTIVE 1994

3DO

Originally planned as a 3DO launch title, *Jurassic Park Interactive* is a rather simple selection of mini-games that mainly revolve around you running away from the T-Rex or taking out dinos with a taser. Ultimately you're trying to ensure as many survivors reach an available heliport as possible, but the bland gameplay and simple mechanics will most likely send you into a state of torpidity.



THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK 1997

PLAYSTATION/SATURN

Like Sega's earlier Mega Drive game, *The Lost World* switches between dinosaur and human protagonists. There are a choice of five this time, all of which play differently to each other. While the gameplay is inventive, the stodgy controls and high difficulty factor are off-putting. We'd recommend seeking out the PlayStation's *Greatest Hits* version instead, as changes were made, resulting in a more enjoyable adventure.

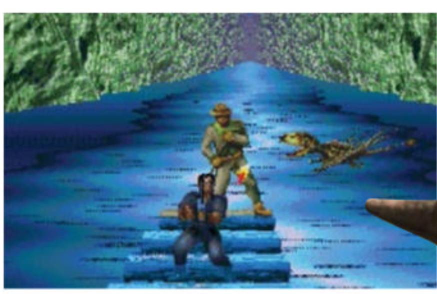




THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK 1997

MEGA DRIVE

Initially this second game from Appaloosa fails to improve due to some extremely bland overhead run-and-gun sections. Stick with it however, as there are several technically impressive mini-games to be found that range from capturing dinosaurs with tranquillisers and frantic motorcycle chases, to fending off attacks while floating downriver on a raft. Appaloosa clearly put some thought into its adventure and its late release makes for one very technically impressive Mega Drive game.



A QUICK INTERVIEW WITH BILL HARBISON



Ocean's graphic artist revisits Jurassic Park and the process of turning a classic movie into a game

Was there much excitement knowing Ocean had secured the licence?

Ocean acquired the licence for *Jurassic Park* when it was still a novel before it was announced that it was going to be a Steven Spielberg movie. This is when the anticipation began to grow. Soon we started to receive a lot of production material to help with the game design: synopsis, costume design photographs, and dinosaur concept sketches.

How did you know what dinosaurs to use in the game?

The sketches we were sent were concepts for the dinosaurs that would be featured in the movie so we could draw them as sprites in the game. We also got photographs of the sick triceratops from the movie, which I used to create the background element in the game.

Why do you think the movie was so popular?

There was a massive hype machine behind *Jurassic Park*. The studio knew they had something revolutionary on their hands and put a huge amount of money into merchandising. The extent of the merchandising wasn't clear until we were sent a video, which was sent to all the companies who were involved. It was basically a showreel for all the *Jurassic Park* products that were going to be released and it was clear you would not be able to move without seeing something with *Jurassic Park* on it.

How difficult was it to create the 3D sections?

I wasn't involved in the 3D section but I did witness the dinosaurs being animated for this section of the game. Ocean had employed some animators from Cosgrove Hall who had worked on *Dangermouse* and *Count Duckula*. This was another humbling experience because Craig Whittle, Helen Smith and Mark Povey could really do animation and their skills were above and beyond ours in the games industry. I learnt a lot from those guys.





THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK 1997

GAME GEAR

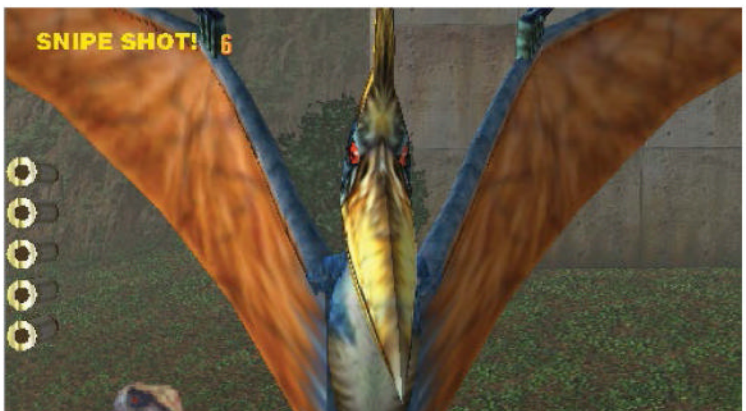


Many won't have played this Game Gear exclusive as it was only released in the States. Like several of the later *Jurassic Park* games, it's a straightforward run-and-gun, but with a more basic set of weapons. There are some nice touches, like being able to tackle levels in different order, which add a nice aesthetic, but it's otherwise pretty forgettable stuff.

THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK 1997

ARCADE

Interestingly, two versions of this game exist. The first features a carnotaurus that was originally due to appear in the film and was quite different to the movie. The large cabinet used for it was also relatively basic due to time constraints. A later version released in 1998 changed the level layouts, replaced the carnotaurus section with a new rampaging T-Rex in a city and added upgrades to the cabinet, including blasts of air to simulate the roar of a T-Rex. Regardless of which version you play, they're both excellent lightgun games that feature simultaneous play and some cool limited-use power-ups.



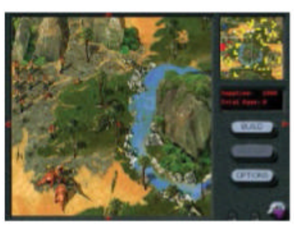


"AN EXCELLENT GAME THAT NOW COMMANDS A HIGH PRICE ONLINE"

JURASSIC PARK: CHAOS ISLAND 1997

PC

Chaos Island marks another first for the series, being the first real-time strategy game. Most of the actors from *The Lost World* reprise their roles, and are playable throughout the game. One particular nice touch is that their eyesight stat indicates how they're affected by fog of war. The 12 levels are loosely based around the events of the films and see you fending off attacks from increasingly stronger dinosaurs, and later, the film's hunters. An excellent game that now commands a high price online.

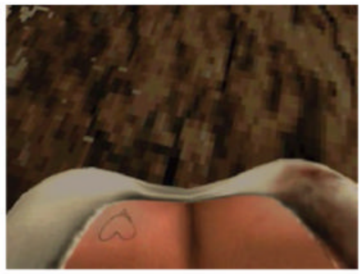




JURASSIC PARK: TRESPASSER 1998

PC

Trespasser was massively hyped on release and promised to be a ground-breaking adventure with 15-square kilometres of explorable terrain. The end result, however, was so power-hungry that many PC owners at the time struggled to run it properly. Those that could found an odd buggy mess of a game that had lots of interesting ideas, as well as a needlessly sexist health system (you check your vitality by looking at a heart-shaped tattoo on your female character's breasts). Like more recent games, it ignores a HUD in order to create a more immersive cinematic experience and promised an innovative control system who's only real successor has been *Surgeon Simulator 2013*. While it disappointed on release, *Trespasser* now boasts an impressive modding community that continues to shape the game to this day, making it one of the franchise's most enduring games.







WARPATH: JURASSIC PARK 1999

PLAYSTATION

You're probably thinking that a one-on-one fighting game featuring dinosaurs would be a terrible idea for a game. You'd be right. Clearly inspired by *Primal Rage*, *Warpath* tries hard by introducing a variety of interesting protagonists, but it's let down by unsatisfying combat and some weak animation. Still, at least we all now know who will win in a fight between a T-Rex and an ankylosaurus...

JURASSIC PARK III: DINO DEFENDER 2001

PC



This PC game is squarely aimed at the younger end of the market. Created by Knowledge Adventure, it's a bright and breezy puzzle-adventure game that revolves around you moving crates and other items while activating switches, avoiding dinosaurs and wearing a robotic powersuit. It's not very challenging, but that's hardly surprising considering its audience.



JURASSIC PARK III: DANGER ZONE 2001

PC

Imagine *Monopoly* crossed with *Jurassic Park* and mini-games and you'll have a good representation of Knowledge Adventure's second game. One of two players take it in turn to navigate the game board, earning points and taking part in various mini-games that range from the fun to the banal. Like *Dino Defender* it's squarely aimed at the younger market, who won't be put off by the irritating announcer and the constant games of Raging Raptors (which is rubbish).

JURASSIC PARK III: ISLAND ATTACK 2001

GAME BOY ADVANCE

This isometric adventure is one of three Konami GBA games based on the third film. While the viewpoint allows for some rather huge dinos, the gameplay itself is rather lacking and dull. It's nice to see the developers focusing on running away from the dinos, but the introduction of the flare gun does makes for some exceedingly clunky combat that only gets worse as the adventure progresses. Leave it well alone.







JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS 2003

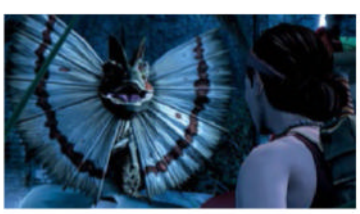
PS2, PC, XBOX

After a disappointing Game Boy Advance effort, Konami made big improvements to its next park builder. Tutorials are excellent, taking you through every aspect of creation. It's also nice graphically, particularly as your park grows in size. Missions ensure that there's always something to work to, while the option to allow your dinos to run amok is also a welcome addition. The lack of available dinos is disappointing and the interface is clunky, but it's still the best park builder for home systems.

JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME 2011

VARIOUS

Sadly, *Jurassic Park* is proof that not everything TellTale Games touches turns to gold. It has all the ropey engine issues found in many of the company's early releases, but compounds it by being one of the least interactive games in its back catalogue. It also doesn't help that the plot itself is terrible, with clichéd characters and uninspiring, unexciting set pieces. A real waste of the licence.









JURASSIC PARK BUILDER 2012

FACEBOOK, IOS, ANDROID

This is quite possibly the most successful of the park builders that's available. Missions rarely require more than a few minutes of your time, meaning you can dip in and out whenever the need suits you. As with many Facebook games, it's designed so you can interact with your friends, but it never feels as intrusive as some titles. While it does use microtransactions we found that you don't need to spend large amounts of money to ensure your park flourishes. There's even a *Pokémon*-styled battle arena thrown in for good measure.

JURASSIC PARK ARCADE 2015

ARCADE

Raw Thrills is one of the arcade's biggest players and its latest game proves why. *Jurassic Park Arcade* is a stupendously good on-rails shooter that boasts stunning visuals, five meaty guns and a plethora of dinos to take down. Like the previous arcade *Jurassic Park* games, there's little substance to it, but the anarchic action and effects will have you constantly pumping coins into it.





LEGO JURASSIC WORLD 2015

VARIOUS

Released only a few months ago, the latest *Lego* game allows you to play through all four movies. You can expect over 100 characters to unlock, including more than 20 dinosaur species, unique abilities for each hero and a whole host of studs and other goodies to collect.



AND THE REST…

- JURASSIC PARK: RAMPAGE EDITION (1994) MEGA DRIVE
- THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK (1997) GAME BOY
- THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK (1997) GAME.COM
- JURASSIC PARK: DINOSAUR BATTLES (2001) PC
- JURASSIC PARK III: THE DNA FACTOR (2001) GBA
- JURASSIC PARK III (2001) ARCADE
- JURASSIC PARK: INSTITUTE TOUR (2001) GBA
- JURASSIC PARK III: SCAN COMMAND (2001) PC
- UNIVERSAL STUDIOS THEME PARK ADVENTURES (2001) GAMECUBE
- JURASSIC PARK III: PARK BUILDER (2001) GBA
- JURASSIC PARK (2010) MOBILE
- LEGO DIMENSIONS: JURASSIC WORLD PLAYSET (2015) VARIOUS
- JURASSIC WORLD: THE GAME (2015) IOS, ANDROID

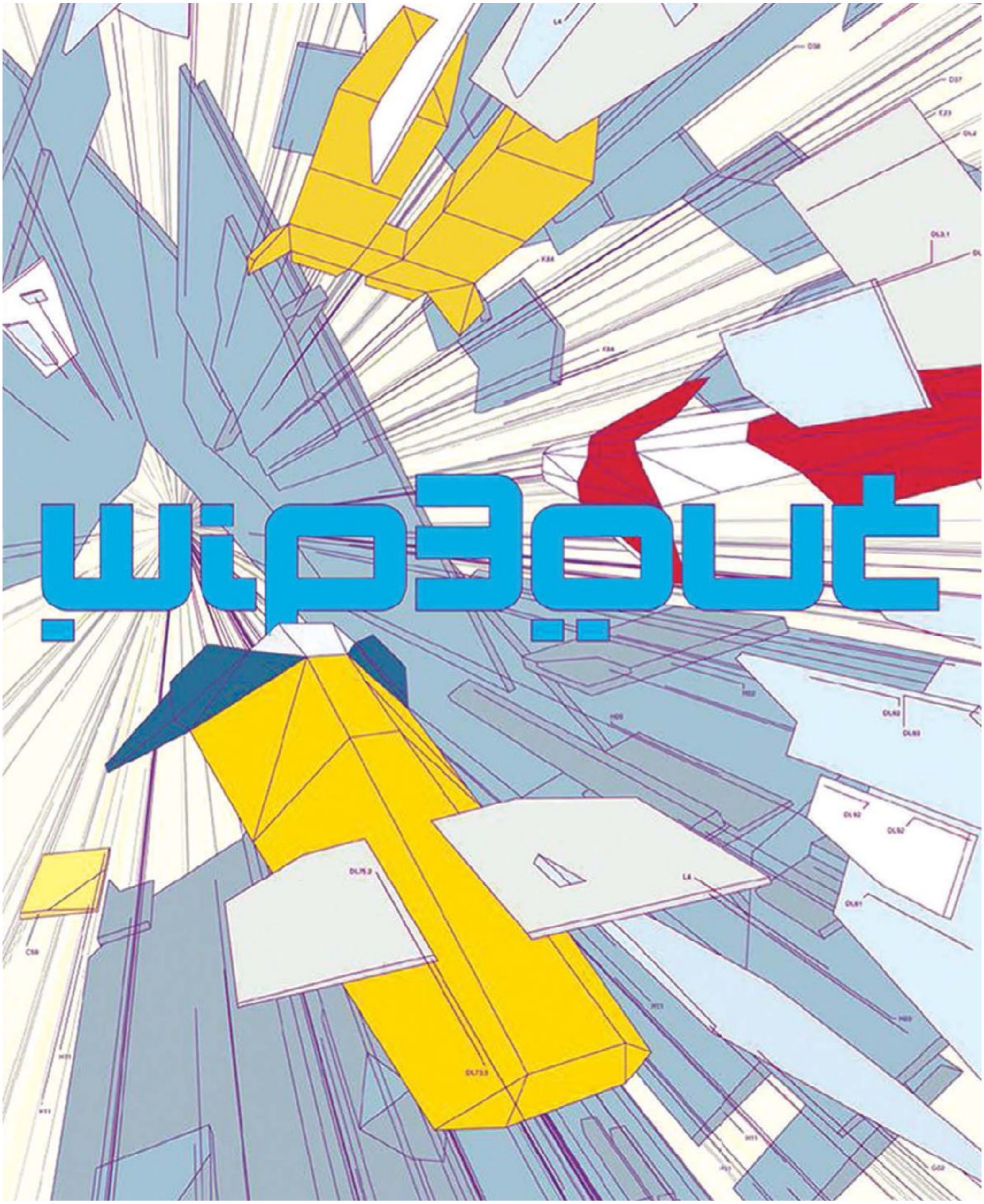
BEST INTRO

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY
PLAYSTATION 2 [KONAMI] **2001**

IF YOU'VE SEEN Marvel movie *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, you might have caught yourself suffering a little bit of déjà vu when watching the opening sequence – a bombastic setpiece that, while not entirely the same, illustrates how cinematic Snake's own return was in his sequel over a decade ago. Emerging from the shadows and stowing aboard a naval carrier, Snake sets about neutralising its entire crew against the backdrop of night, culminating in a rain-lashed knife fight with Olga. Kojima's love of Hollywood tropes created a barnstorming sequence of events that the series has yet to better, and while the ultimate twist was that Snake would be taking a backseat to a blonde whining protagonist in Raiden, the opening minutes proved he was still a hero to be reckoned with, even if we'd have to wait a while longer before he got his chance in the spotlight once again.






wip3out

BEHIND THE SCENES

WIP3OUT

It may not have flown off the shelves but Wip3out was the best of the games in the franchise to hit the PlayStation. games™ discovers how it was made



Released: 1999
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Psygnosis
Key Staff: David Jefferies (programmer), Wayne Imlach (lead design), Nicky Wescott (lead graphics), Gary McKill (music and sound), Alan Raistrick (producer)

WHAT IS IN A NAME? Quite a lot, if that name happens to be *WipEout*, the fast-moving, futuristic racer that had hearts pulsating and fingers twitching upon its debut in 1995. Canny marketing by The Designers Republic and its unique in-game styling produced a game that transcended a still-young, nerd-labelled industry. In doing so, it put *WipEout* centre stage in bleeding-edge nightclubs and the rave-infested underground culture, ensuring the game pulled in sackfuls of dollars.

In 1999, some three years after the sequel *WipEout 2097*, developer Psygnosis, which was by now under Sony ownership, decided to revisit the game as a PlayStation exclusive. It fiddled with the name by reversing the letter E to produce a number 3 for the European version – thus creating *Wip3out* – but the game wasn't the third in the series. It was the fourth. The third had been a Nintendo 64 exclusive put out a year earlier called *Wipeout 64*. "It was seen as more of a hybrid of *WipEout* & *WipEout 2097* rather than a standalone in its own right, even though it introduced a bunch of game features unique to the N64 version, which found themselves used in later iterations," says *Wip3out* lead designer Wayne Imlach.

The success of *Wipeout 64* showed how popular the franchise had remained among gamers but the team working on *Wip3out* at Psygnosis' Leeds studio was afforded very few luxuries. It was hit with both a tight schedule and a small budget because Sony needed the game to be released before gamers gave up on the PlayStation and moved to the PS2. But for many of those involved, the opportunity was too good to pass and so they threw themselves into the task in hand with great focus.

As if to underline how tight the schedule was, the team had just nine months to get the game on to shop shelves (it was sold as *WipEout 3* in the US). "It was a very quick turnaround for a game, even considering that we had a solid foundation to start with in the previous title, *2097*," says Imlach. "Because of this, we had to be careful about features – anything too new or untried would be high risk and we couldn't afford to slip much. So the innovations were small, and the focus was put on refining what already existed. The team was also quite small relative to other games."

The first task for the team was to identify any niggles that had emerged with past games in the franchise and right them. The main problem with the very first game was its difficulty, an issue that saw a great many gamer fail to progress further than a couple of tracks before throwing their joypad down in anger at yet another stalled run. "The first game was seminal and groundbreaking, but a little rough round the edges particularly with unforgiving ship handling," says programmer David Jefferies. To address this, Imlach says the game balance was evened up, giving it a "shallower progression" than the previous games, "Yet retaining the insane skill requirements at the highest levels."

Rather than write the game from scratch, the team took *WipEout 2097* as its starting point, pulling out a development version of that game so that it had something to work on almost immediately. Imlach headed up a team of three level designers and his job was to redesign the game's basic elements and manage the circuit design and optimisation of the



As always, the tracks would not only go straight along but corkscrew down at a blistering speed for added coolness.

game. His team was not only able to make use of a set of recently released PlayStation code optimisation utilities, but they were also able to draw on years of experience that had given them a strong insight into how far they could potentially take the PSOne.

"We felt we could really push the technical envelope of what was possible on the PlayStation, adding some features that were missing, giving the visuals a complete overhaul from The Designer's Republic but keeping to the values of the franchise so that fans of the previous games wouldn't feel alienated by the new game," says Jefferies. Imlach agrees. "One of the advantages of developing for a mature system is the refinement that comes from knowing the hardware inside out, hence the hi-res without a sacrifice of frame rate which is something that wasn't possible with the earlier iterations."

AS WITH THE previous versions of *WipEout*, the game was written first and foremost for PAL PlayStations running at 25 frames per second. It was then converted for a NTSC audience at 30fps. A side effect of this, says Jefferies, was that the NTSC versions of the game ran a little quicker at the expense of slightly lower resolution, but because the game didn't perform any timing conversions, the race clock ran faster on the NTSC version. "This explains why your race times are 20 per cent faster than your American friends," he exclaims.

But the team was also keen on using aspects of the PlayStation that development teams had previously avoided. "One of our priorities was using the PlayStation's hi-def and widescreen mode which, up to that point, had been considered unusable by development teams," explains Jefferies. "By optimising the renderer we were able to increase the resolution of the game from the standard 256 x 240 to 512 x 256, which made for a much crisper image."

An interesting side effect of running the game in a widescreen 512 x 256 was that the technique allowed for the rendering of two perfectly square split screens side-by-side rather than the usual top and bottom. Each split screen was therefore 256 x 256, "Or to put it another way, they were both the same resolution as single screen *Wipeout 2097* and running on the same hardware. Impressive stuff," enthuses Jefferies.

The split-screen functionality allowed for one-TV multiplayer, an advance on the original version that required players to connect two PlayStations via



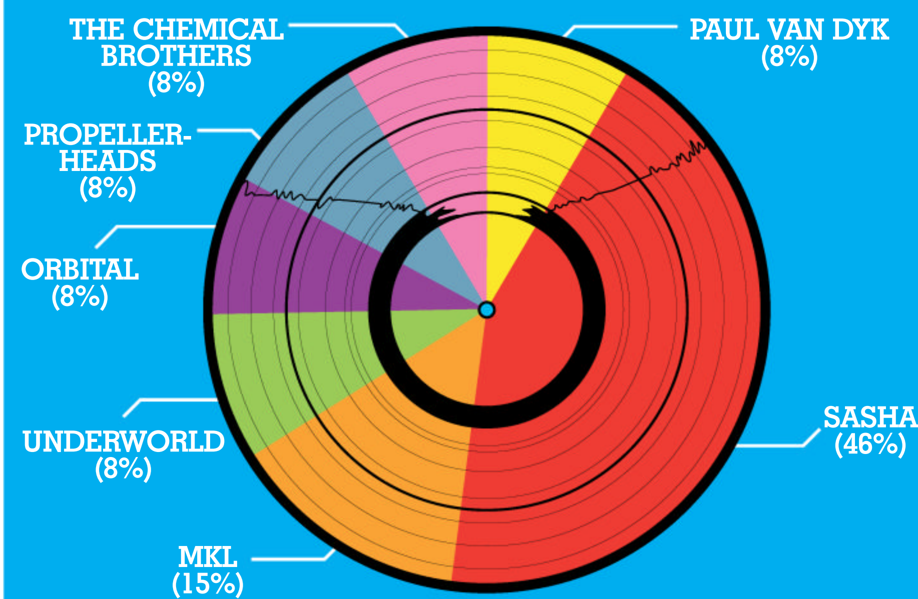
The graphical boundaries of the PlayStation were pushed with *Wip3out*, producing a game that was both high-res and fast.

LISTEN UP

DJ Sasha seized control of the music on Wip3out

THE *WIPEOUT* SERIES had already gained a reputation for its musical excellence, drawing upon the underground rave culture, which gripped the UK at that time.

With *Wip3out*, DJ Sasha was asked to oversee the soundtrack and, so confident was the game's developer that people would want to listen to the tunes, the game's CD could even be played in a standard CD player. "The music was more cohesive – I think getting a single individual to mix and direct the various compositions gave the game a more focused track list, without sacrificing the techno/club soundtrack that defined the series," says lead designer Wayne Imlach on this revolutionary decision.



SASHA – Sasha was the musical director on *Wip3out* and he dominated the game's audio, contributing no fewer than six of the 13 tracks including *FEISAR*, *Icarus*, *Auricom*, *Goteki 45*, *Pirhana* and *Xpander*. He also headlined a club tour of the USA sponsored by developer Psygnosis. He told music paper *NME* at the time: "The series has always had a huge underground following – I'm certain that the crossover between the people who listen to my music and those who enjoy games like *WipEout* is enormous."

MKL – With two dance tunes – *Surrender* and *Control* – MKL's decision to switch from being a drummer to the producer of electronic music certainly paid off.

UNDERWORLD – This British electronic group had its origins in the Eighties, but it was hugely popular in the mid-Nineties thanks to the success of *Born Slippy*, a tune made famous thanks to the Danny Boyle classic movie *Trainspotting*. Underground contributed *Kittens* to *Wip3out*.

ORBITAL – Brothers Phil and Paul Hartnoll made up the dance music duo Orbital, which recorded *Know Where To Run* for *Wip3out*. Paul must have been struck by the opportunity because, following the break-up of Orbital, he went on to record tracks for the 2005 game *Wipeout Pure* on the PSP.

PROPELLERHEADS – This big-beat musical ensemble had already included the song *Bang On!* for *Wipeout 64*, so giving *Lethal Cut* to *Wip3out* was something of a natural progression.

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS – No strangers to the *WipEout* franchise, The Chemical Brothers had allowed *Chemical Beats* to be used on the first game. *Wip3out* saw the inclusion of the tune *Influence* as well.

PAUL VAN DYK – German electronic dance music DJ Paul van Dyk is no stranger to videogames today, having produced tunes for *FIFA*, *Need For Speed*, *DJ Hero*, *Grand Slam Tennis*, *Mirror's Edge* and more, but his first taste of a gaming soundtrack came with *Avenue* on *Wip3out*.



It was possible to view the game from a first-person perspective, which actually made getting around the tracks much easier for many.

WHAT THEY SAID...



WipEout 3 is the most difficult and intense racing game I've played. A powerful effort from Psygnosis' Leeds studio

Gamers' Republic, 1999



a serial cable in order to play against friends. "The drawback with the old system was that you needed two tellies, two PlayStations and two copies of the game – all in one room, which limited the number of people who could experience it, especially given the weight of old CRT tellies back then – they were not easy to carry around your friend's house," Jefferies exclaims humorously.

BUT BRINGING THIS mode to the game posed problems of its own. Taking a game that wasn't designed for split screen and adding it is a major undertaking because the console needs to render two views when the game is optimised to run at exactly 30fps in one view. "With split-screen the game is still rasterising the same number of pixels as a single screen but it needs to transform twice the number of polygons into 3D space before doing the rasterising," says Jefferies.

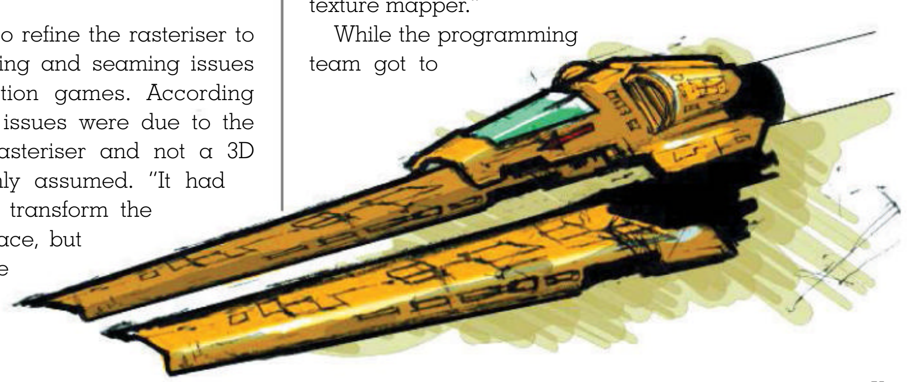
Yet the *Wip3out* team managed to crack the issue with a few optimisation tricks to improve the speed. "Ships in the distance would be rendered at a lower polygon resolution than ones nearby," Jefferies adds. "Seeing as the polygon count of the ships was fairly small anyway, this meant they turned into little wedges of cheese in the mid-distance but with all the carnage going on you rarely noticed.

The team was also able to refine the rasteriser to eliminate the polygon clipping and seaming issues that had plagued PlayStation games. According to Jefferies, many of these issues were due to the PlayStation having a 2D rasteriser and not a 3D rasteriser as was commonly assumed. "It had some hardware that would transform the polygon vertices into 3D space, but when it came to rasterise the polygons, it discarded any notion of depth and perspective and rasterised the triangles as 2D textures," he says.

"It was this that caused the textures to 'swim' unconvincingly as they approached the camera. These artefacts were compounded by the hardware's inability to clip polygons as they approach the camera clip plane. This caused polygons to flick off and disappear when they got too close to the camera. Texturing and clipping problems were particularly bad for racing games because having a low-down camera travelling down a track at speed exacerbated these issues. Our rendering engineer Pete Bratcher did a great job in rewriting the renderer that came with the Sony libraries to clip polygons correctly and adjust for the lack of perspective in the texture mapper."

WE FELT WE COULD REALLY PUSH THE TECHNICAL ENVELOPE OF WHAT WAS POSSIBLE ON THE PLAYSTATION

While the programming team got to

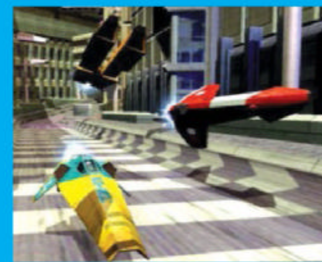


STAYING ON TRACK

From 20 to 8: how the Wip3out designers chose the best courses

■ TRACK DESIGN is one of the key elements to absolutely any racing game, so it comes as no surprise to learn that the *Wip3out* team took it very seriously. The artists produced around 20 tracks in total, but just eight of those were chosen for the main game, a process which entailed much play-testing by the team to ensure that the tracks were as perfect as reasonably possible.

According to lead designer Wayne Imlach, the criteria for selection was not only down to overall skill requirements, "But to provide advantages and disadvantages to the different craft manufacturers with tighter tracks favouring the slower yet nimbler ships." Once the tracks were chosen, "They were worked up into the final tracks with environment and buildings and spot effects and so on," continues Jefferies.



WHAT THEY SAID...



From the tastefully minimalist front-end graphics (laden with Designer's Republic intervention as in the rest of the game) to the flawless injection-moulded smoothness of the tracks, supremacy of construction is in evidence everywhere

PLAY, 1999

team got to grips with the engine, the audio crew began amassing the tunes. *Wip3out* took a slightly different approach to the music and it enlisted the superstar trance DJ Sasha to be the music director. Why? "Well, 1999 was the year of trance after all," says Jefferies. "He produced a selection of great tracks for us to use in the game, including *Xpander*, which did pretty well in the charts at the time. It was great working with him and he came to Leeds and met the team and got very involved. He went on a Global Underground tour where he projected videos of the game playing behind him as he DJed and there were some great times going to see Sasha play his *Wip3out* gig at Creamfields. Some of us even made it over to see him play Space in Ibiza."

■■■ MEANWHILE, THE ART and design crew worked on a new set of tracks. Nicky Wescott was the head artist and she had been team leader on the first two titles. Her boyfriend, who later became her husband, was Mike Place who worked at The Designers Republic and carried out the graphic design of the game. "So right from the beginning it was like DR was on the team, which was massively important," adds Jefferies.

The levels were initially built with no dressing whatsoever – just basic polygon tracks floating in space. The artists started "by lofting a racing line in SoftImage and exporting it into the game engine," says Jefferies, of a drafting technique that allows for the generation of curved lines. "You could race the tracks at this point but, visually, they looked like a ribbon of track going through space with no background."

This was done because the team felt it was important to get the racing aspect feeling right before spending any time on set dressing, as changes to the layout would be expensive once scenery was built. "We spent quite a bit of time analysing the tracks from the earlier games and we derived a short 'track



■ The visual style was similar to the previous *WipEout* games, producing a cool, underground, almost Japanese feel to the tracks.

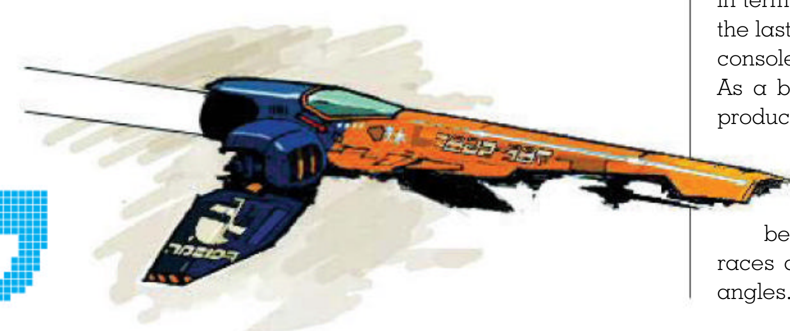
design bible' that highlighted the pros and cons of all the various track features you could include, including items, such as the width of the track, angle of corners, altitude changes, everything," recalls Imlach. "If you put something into the track design, there was an expectation of knowing to some degree how it might

> **THE TEAM HAD JUST NINE MONTHS TO GET THE GAME INTO SHOPS**

affect the game before you tested it. We didn't have time for random design. You needed to know what you were doing and have a reason for every corner, curve and crossover."

The artists distinguished the game from *WipEout 2097* by using a different palette and cleaner lines, helped by the hi-res mode, but the game still conveyed the futuristic cityscapes and environments that defined the look of the game. "I think it felt a little more mature in terms of art style, which was appropriate as it was the last of the series to come out on the generation of consoles it was originally created on," says Imlach. As a bonus, four more unlockable test tracks were produced late in development "using the vector art style as a cheap way to introduce more tracks without the art overhead," Imlach adds.

Wip3out was also given a replay function because the team believed that the high-speed races deserved to be viewed from different camera angles. Jefferies says the technical concept behind



> A GAMING EVOLUTION WipEout > Wip3out > G-Surfers



With its styling, club music and fast-paced action, *WipEout*'s futuristic spacecrafts – and insane difficulty – became iconic.



G-Surfers had undisputed parallels with *Wip3out* including a two-player split screen mode and modern craft.



replays on the PlayStation was simple – "you recorded each button that the user pressed on each frame and then, for the replay, you simply played back each button press and the race would unfold exactly the same as it did the first time round" – but, in practise, retro-fitting replays to a game that didn't support them proved to be an immensely fiddly and frustrating task.

"All of the physics, artificial intelligence and random number generation had to be exactly deterministic, which is never the case," he recalls. "If you feed the same values into an AI system twice then you might expect it to give you the same result each time but, in practise, AI and physics systems have a degree of randomness built into them to make them unpredictable, so when you try and replay a race it looks different to first time around. When you add to this the fact that extensive randomness is used throughout the particle systems – which are different depending on camera angle (and of course camera angle is different in a replay) – then it becomes a huge spaghetti mess that you have to untangle to achieve this feature."

NOT THAT THE end result suffered. Indeed, replays looked great and the process was so efficient that the team was able to use some of the spare processing time to put some flare and trail effects on the ships. The look and feel of the game was stunning with the futuristic graphic design championed by The Designers Republic and a render engine displayed to its full potential. "The whole package ended up working very well together and consequently the game came away with the Best Design award at BAFTA for 1999," says Jefferies proudly.

The game coincided with the advent of the analogue controller and so, for the first time, the series was able to benefit from added support for these sticks. It had proven to be a popular control method and, given Sony's influence on *Wip3out*, it was something the coding team could not afford to dismiss. Even so, it was a controversial inclusion. "The nature of analogue input is very different to digital input and it ended up making the racing easier because analogue controls afforded the player more control over the input," admits Jefferies. "This upset some traditionalists who didn't like us releasing a version of the game where better times could be gained by using the DualShock."

But it wasn't as if the game was easy. It did have a difficult learning curve and this went down well with reviewers who raved over the game in both the specialist and national press which also praised the title for its graphics, split screen, new weapons and soundtrack. And yet sales of the game were sluggish. Not even a special edition released in Europe in 2000 could make it into an overwhelming success despite bringing different craft physics, older courses and four-person multiplayer to the table. The problem, says Jefferies, was the European-centric nature of the franchise and also because attention was switching to other, more advanced machines.

"*WipEout* was always a very European and UK series and so the relatively low sales compared to titles that sold across the world wasn't that surprising," Jefferies says. It didn't help, he continues passionately, that *Wip3out* was the first PlayStation title to ship with a new form of copy protection that meant even legitimate copies of the game would not play on a modded Playstation. "People who had modded their console had no choice but to acquire a pirated version of the game, which had the copy protection stripped from it," he says. "I don't know if this meant that we lost lots of potential sales but later titles no longer used that form of copy protection."

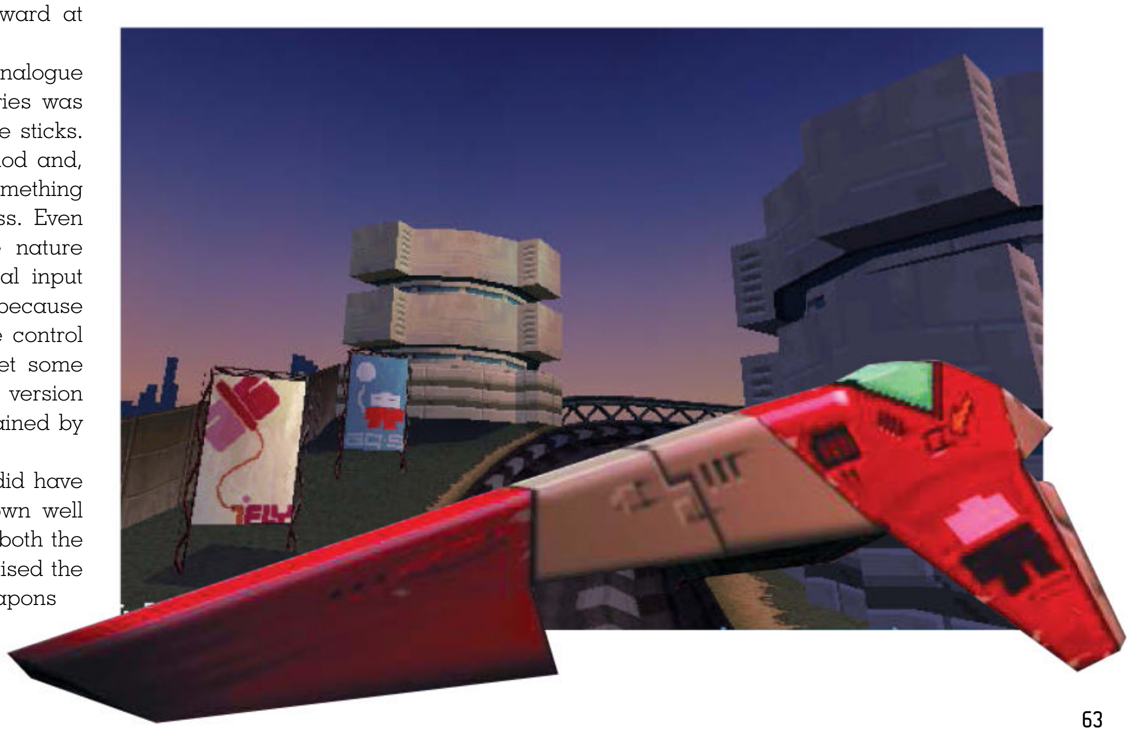
Of course, *Wip3out* wasn't the end of the franchise. It became Sony's baby, spawning more sequels including *WipEout Fusion*, *WipEout Pure*, *WipEout Pulse*, *WipEout HD* and *WipEout 2048*. *WipEout* games have since appeared on the PS2, the PSP, the PS3 and the PS Vita and it will, we are sure, come to the PS4 in due course, even taking into account the closure of developer Sony Studio Liverpool before the console launched. "Everyone loved *WipEout*," says Jefferies. "The slickness, the visuals, the graphic design, the music and the club culture had perfectly captured the PlayStation generation."





The overall look and feel of *Wip3out* was of a PlayStation 2 game. This was important, however, in order to sell copies at the end of the PSOne's life.







UNCOVERING ATARI'S SECRET

IN A SPECIAL EDITORIAL FROM E.T. CODER HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW, THE ATARI VETERAN UNCOVERS THE URBAN LEGEND BURIED BENEATH A MEXICAN LANDFILL AND CONFRONTS HIS MOST INFAMOUS CREATION





IT IS AN interesting thing to witness your past being dug up… literally! There I stood amongst tractors and backhoes, pelted repeatedly by the raging sand storm. Waiting… watching… wondering what the next scoop might reveal. Had I actually created a game so devastatingly bad, so horrifically shameful that Atari had no alternative but to truck it ninety miles into the desert and bury it?

Whenever I make a game, my primary design goal is innovation. I seek to create something brand new or *boldly* expand the concept of some existing design. *Yars' Revenge* introduced many features which became industry standards. *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was by far the most diverse adventure on the platform at the time and it was the first movie conversion ever. And on April 26, 2014 in Alamogordo, New Mexico, I saw *E.T.* (my third game) become groundbreaking in a whole new way. A way I had never imagined while coding it some 32 years earlier.

The day started with a twenty-minute drive (during which we dropped 4,500 feet in elevation) before arriving at the entrance to the area containing the excavation site. Hundreds of people were already queued up there, waiting to be admitted to a garbage dump. Extraordinary. As we approached the dig proper there were camera crews and lights and food trucks and lots of equipment. People were scurrying around in every direction with facemasks and bandanas to keep sand and dust out of their lungs. When they opened the gates a human wave descended upon the site. People came from all over the country, apparently for two reasons. One was to get autographs on any piece of *E.T.* paraphernalia they could carry (or manufacture in some cases). I signed cartridges, boxes, posters, consoles, manuals, comics, E.T. dolls, wooden E.T. cutouts and one automobile (Ernie Cline's DeLorean)! The other reason they came was to settle the truth of a long-standing urban legend, to see if the desert would yield a few copies (or a few million) of my infamous creation, the *E.T.* videogame.

It was a wild day in the desert. The excitement, the energy, the sand storm, the mayor, the anticipation, the sound of heavy machinery, cameras and boom mics everywhere you turn. It was pandemonium… and it was *awesome*! And all of this was happening because 27 July 1982 I answered "Yes".

The question (posed by Ray Kassar, Atari CEO) was this: "Howard, can you deliver a game for *E.T.* by September 1st?" There was no hesitation. It was a crazy notion but I knew I had to do it. And three decades later, here I stand in the middle of all this chaos, feeling incredibly honoured to have created the basis of this whole adventure. I'm so grateful I said "Yes" that day.

"PEOPLE WERE SCURRYING AROUND IN EVERY DIRECTION WITH FACEMASKS TO KEEP SAND AND DUST OUT OF THEIR LUNGS"



MYTHBUSTERS

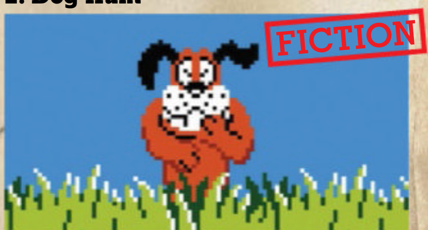
Delving into the murky fog between fact and fiction, **games™** takes a look at four other game legends

1. The Mystery of Polybius



A mysterious cabinet titled *Polybius* apparently appeared around Portland, Oregon in 1981, said to be part of a government experiment.

2. Dog Hunt



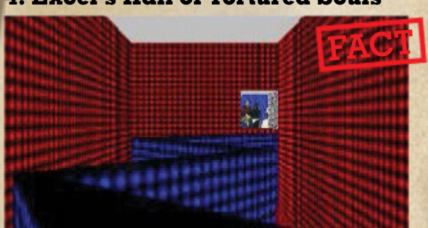
It might have started due to the fact that it existed in the arcade iteration, but NES gamers rumoured that you could shoot the dog in *Duck Hunt.*

3. Blowing Game Cartridges



The fact is that in blowing on the cartridge, you'd release tiny traces of saliva that, in the long run, would corrode away the pin connectors.

4. Excel's Hall of Tortured Souls



Buried inside your Excel 95 spreadsheet lurks a secret videogame titled 'The Hall Of Tortured Souls'.

And that was no trivial "Yes." I had accepted the shortest schedule ever contemplated for a videogame, by more than 75%! By the time Atari and Steven Spielberg finished negotiations for the *E.T.* licence there were only five weeks left to create the game and still make the Christmas market (there's no point in doing a game if it misses that market). No one had ever done a game in less than five or six months and I had five weeks! From Tuesday, 27 July to Wednesday, 1 September. Okay, technically I had 36 days, but it was already dinner time on the first day.

So I started working and I kept working. I even had a development system moved into my home. The only time I was more than two minutes away from coding was driving between work and home. It was the most gruelling five weeks of my life, but I did it. What I did was produce the videogame many consider to be the all time worst. A game so bad it allegedly toppled the entire videogame industry in the mid Eighties. Well… you can't say my work hasn't had impact.

At one point I caught a moment between interviews. I'm standing at the centre of a hoard of fans and onlookers in this raging sand storm. Everyone is fixated on the groaning backhoe, relentlessly reaching deeper into the earth and returning with the next bucketful of antiquity… and that's when it hit me. I realized what I had actually accomplished in that five weeks. A game? Certainly. The worst of all time? Possibly. A Herculean task achieved? Absolutely.

But the most significant thing I did by making *E.T.* in five weeks was to create a piece of videogame history. Undeniably, inextricably, for better or worse till death do us part; *E.T.* and I were forever joined as a legend in the annals of gaming lore. I never really got it before. I certainly never considered this possibility while I was doing the game, and why would I? When I was doing *E.T.*, there was no videogame history. *E.T.* was just "my next game." You have to remember, videogames were considered by many to be a fad in the early Eighties, and the big market crash of 1983-84 seemed to prove that.

Now, with the benefit of hindsight and three decades, we know there *is* a history. Now there are "oldies" to revisit and explore. Back then they were all newies. We weren't making history or future nostalgia, so what were we doing? For my own part, the goal was clear. My mission was to relieve boredom, like the kind I experienced as a teen. I was a member of the last generation to grow up without videogames. Boredom was the bane of my adolescence and I understood the massive power of videogames to alleviate that problem. I wanted to spare others what I had endured. I wanted to prevent history from repeating itself.



■ *E.T.* may well be the worst game of all time, by the creator's admission.

> **"AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST I KNOW ALL TOO WELL THAT NOTHING GETS RESOLVED IN THE PAST, ONLY THE PRESENT"**

History. That's what this is all about. Reaching back to the past to answer questions, verify legends and settle disputes. As a psychotherapist I know all too well that nothing ever gets resolved in the past, only the present can provide that opportunity. And at present the dirt and the garbage and the stench kept coming up… but no games.

It's a well documented fact I have always doubted the truth of the myth. I never believed it because it couldn't possibly make sense. Why would a financially failing company spend a lot of time, effort and money to dispose of something presumably worthless? Of course, when I say this I'm forgetting one of the fundamental truths of that beautiful bygone era: Whenever you expect things to make sense, you are losing touch with Atari.

I was waiting for my order at a food truck (my blood sugar was starting to crash after six hours of all this) when suddenly a roar went up from the throng. A huge crush of people were pressing closer and closer to the fence around the excavation site. One of the production people ran over to me and said, "Come on, we gotta go!" Then they literally got behind me and started pushing very convincingly. Upon wedging through the crowd and reaching the fence, I saw Zak Penn (Hollywood luminary and director of the documentary driving this entire extravaganza) standing there with a microphone in one hand and what looked like a somewhat crushed but very discernible *E.T.* game box.

"We found it!" he proclaimed with great triumph in his voice. There was a visible relief in his demeanour as well, since his film is much better off with a strike than a miss. The games were there; I never thought they would be. I have never been so happy to be wrong!

It was a sign, an affirmation of just how crazy Atari was. But by the same token, that craziness made Atari an incredible place to work and an amazing place to be. Atari was a hotbed of abject excess that could never last and could never be replaced.







Atari (as I knew and loved it) evaporated in mid 1984 and soon thereafter I left. But where do you go after an experience like Atari? Apparently you wind up in a sand storm in the desert.

Everyone is cheering and shouting and the air is filled with excitement and wonder (and dust)! And here come the cameras and microphones in my face, "Hey Howard, what are you feeling now?"

And suddenly everything goes eerily quiet. I feel things welling up inside me. I realise the whole reason I made games was to entertain and amuse people. To give them a break from day-to-day life and to create wonderful moments. And on this day, in the middle of the New Mexico desert, my game is doing exactly that! A piece of work I did 32 years ago is still creating a special moment for hundreds of people. My heart swells and I am overwhelmed with gratitude. And I cry tears of joy.

I was seeing remnants of an old life, right at the time as starting a new one. Atari was by far the greatest job I had ever had, until now. As a psychotherapist, this is the first time in 30 years that my work is more rewarding and satisfying than what I experienced at Atari. I always believed I would get here someday, because I'm an optimist, but this was a long time coming. How interesting that this Atari news resurfaces precisely now, just as I'm hitting my stride in a bonus round of right time, right place in my life.

My musings continued as the heavy machinery droned on, delivering scoop after scoop of historic relics scattered amongst the useless waste. Fortunately there were several anthropologists on hand to clarify which was which. Life has a funny way of coming full circle. After 30 years the gaming industry is back to making simple games for smaller screens. I've come full circle too. Back then I catered to hungry technophiles by entertaining them. Now as The Silicon Valley Therapist I'm once again meeting their needs, but this time in a deeper, more meaningful way. My current life plan is aggressive, just like the development of *E.T.* But I do hope I get better reviews this time.

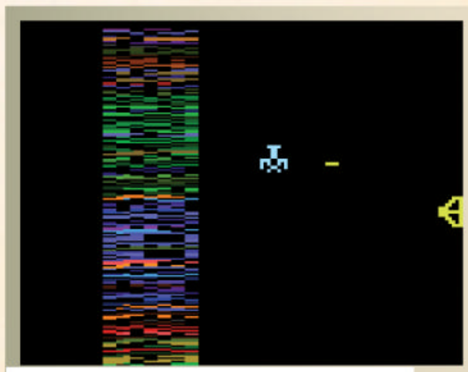
And speaking of reviews, I was asked about *NeoComputer*'s project to "fix the bugs" in *E.T.* The reporter seemed a tad sheepish when asking the question, but truthfully I am not uncomfortable acknowledging playability problems with my *E.T.* game. In other words, I am well grounded in reality. I have played the updated version and I believe it improves the game substantially. It eliminates the biggest problem with the game in my opinion: player disorientation. If I'd had another day or two perhaps I would have made those changes… but then again, if I had, we might not be talking about it right now.

In the end, the burial was real but it really wasn't about burying *E.T.* In fact, the majority of the salvaged bounty was composed of hit carts, top sellers like *Defender*, *Centipede* and *Yars' Revenge*. There were consoles and peripherals too. This was clearly a warehouse dump, not an *E.T.* graveyard. So maybe it didn't make sense to bury millions of *E.T.* games just to hide their corporate shame, after all. But then again, what sense does it make to create a legend around it?

After all the years of speculation, this much is true: I've got one game in the New York Museum of Modern Art and another in a hole in the New Mexico desert. I faced the unearthing of my past… and I totally dug it!



■ Even by 8-bit standards, the game comes across as incredibly basic, with parts of it even unfinished.



■ Player disorientation is blamed as *E.T.*'s worst flaw, and it's easy to see why…

"SUDDENLY, EVERYTHING GOES EERILY QUIET"



WHY I ♥...

Sid Meier's Pirates!

IAIN WILLOWS, 2K GAMES

"Sid Meier's Pirates! *is the one. If I had to go back to something...I played it again recently and it brought back so many memories. I'm not necessarily into the pirate thing but it was the immersion. You really got into having your fleet of ships, sword fighting was excellent and I had a real bug for treasure maps – you'd get a snippet of a treasure map and try and find the cross. It was one of those games where you could get hours and hours of fun. All that time ago they built this game that had so much to it that you could literally spend hours upon hours playing it. Most games you spent hours and hours on because they were difficult or broken, but this had such a huge amount of depth so early in the medium.*"



> “[It] had such a huge amount of depth so early in the medium”
>
> IAIN WILLOWS, 2K GAMES

GAME CHANGERS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

Released: 2000 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** N64



Majora's Mask was one of a few N64 titles that required Expansion Pak support, as its cleaner textures and detailed backgrounds required the extra 4Mb of RAM.

Succeeding one of the most critically acclaimed titles ever made, this more nuanced Zelda entry is an example of a game that was way ahead of its time

DESPITE ITS BRILLIANCE, it almost seems anarchic to claim that *Majora's Mask* is a more forward-thinking and influential title than its older sibling, *Ocarina Of Time*. Although *Ocarina* revolutionised 3D gaming, tearing up the adventure game rulebook in the process, *Majora's Mask* was a work of experimentation and, ultimately, innovation. Through building upon the wonderful framework pioneered by the previous game, Nintendo managed to push its 64-bit console to the limit and in the process created a franchise entry with an unprecedented amount of depth.

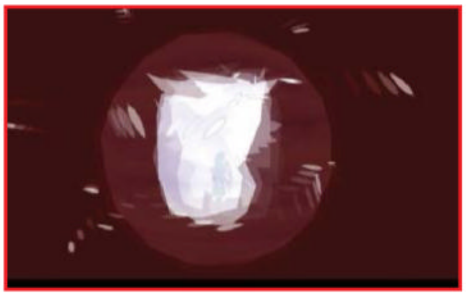
This depth arises from multiple junctures. Although the basics of the game are the same as that of *Ocarina*, *Majora's Mask* is more a manifestation of creativity than a tour de force of mechanical design. Seen in the game are various concepts that weren't present in *Ocarina Of Time*, and so at its root it feels more like a work of heart – a risky yet confident segue into uncharted territory for the series.

Of course the exemplary gameplay and graphics inherent in *Ocarina Of Time* had been brought forward for Link's second N64 outing. The game was built in the same engine as its predecessor and utilised the same graphics package, therefore enabling the development team to turn the game around in only a year, compared to the four-year development cycle enjoyed by *Ocarina*. The same combat returned – complete with strange camera mechanics – as did a focus on dungeon crawling and elements of open-world exploration. However, this is where the comparisons to *Ocarina* end.

In narrative terms *Majora's Mask* strikes a more adult chord. Opening with Link riding through a misty forest to search for a friend, the game introduces the Skull Kid, sporting the game's eponymous facial attire. This mask was stolen from the Happy Mask Shop salesman, found in Hyrule market in *Ocarina Of Time*, and he hints at an ancient apocalyptic power that resides within it. Link enters Clock Town in

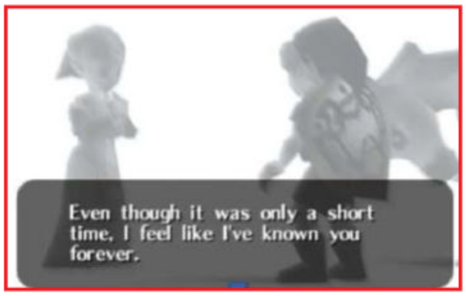
ADVENTURE TIME

MAJORA'S MASK PROVED ITSELF TO BE A MORE THOUGHTFUL EXAMPLE OF THE ADVENTURE GENRE WITH THESE SPECIAL ELEMENTS



FAST TRAVEL

★ Unlike in earlier *Zelda* titles, Link is able to fast travel in *Majora's Mask*, which goes some way to mitigating the effects of the real-time cycle. Although we are used to seeing far bigger game worlds nowadays, the land of Termina was pretty large for its time and trekking across it with only six in-game hours left is not exactly a formula for fun.



SENTIMENT

★ The *Zelda* series has always done a sterling job of providing moments of emotional heft. These are littered throughout *Majora's Mask* – from seeing the Skull Kid embracing two fairies and crying because he's lonely to the moment when Link experiences a flashback to talking to Princess Zelda, everything here carries a certain weight.



BOSSES

★ The franchise has never been short of excellent boss fights, but a couple of the mayors in *Majora's Mask* really stand out. Pictured here is the boss at the end of Woodfall Temple, one of the four giants that Link has to face to prevent the moon from falling. The main event against *Majora's Mask* on the moon is one of the best in the whole franchise.

the land of Termina to find the moon will fall from the sky after three days and destroy the world.

Link sets about conquering four dungeons and the giants within in order to force them out of hiding to stop the moon from falling, enabling him to go up to the moon and face the Skull Kid and Majora's Mask once and for all. This threat carries weight where the likes of Ganondorf never could, as the moon is visibly sinking lower in the sky with every second that passes, and conversations with NPCs reveal their thoughts on the imminent apocalypse.

Masks play far more of a role in the game than they did in *Ocarina*, with a select few proving necessary to progress in the game and allowing Link to shape-shift. These few masks are simple to obtain, however the larger proportion of the 24 masks available in the game require very specific criteria to be met, often at very specific times throughout the game's three-day cycle. This feature still hasn't seen a rival outside of the RPG space to this day. That an action-adventure would display such intricacies is still impressive 14 years later, and highlights the astute nature of the game's design.

THE MOST INTERESTING CONCEPTS ARE THE GAME'S REAL-TIME ASPECT AND TIME TRAVEL MECHANICS

KEY FACTS

■ *Majora's Mask* necessitated the use of the N64's Expansion Pak, so rumours were abound at the time that it was originally a project intended for the 64DD.

■ At the beginning of the game Link is seen travelling through a forest, in search for a friend that isn't named. However, it is considered in all circles to most likely be Navi from *Ocarina Of Time.*

■ Many character designs from *Ocarina* appear in *Majora's Mask*, although not one recurring character recognises Link and no explanation is offered why they now inhabit Termina instead of Hyrule.

■■■ IN TYPICAL NINTENDO fashion the art direction is incredible and the series' ability to neatly theme dungeons and areas around elemental factors are no more apparent than in *Majora's Mask*. Most surprising is the depiction of the moon's surface, as when Link arrives it is revealed to be a vast, colourful field with a lone tree at its centre – further proof of the game's unwillingness to resort to the familiar.

However, the most interesting concepts at work in *Majora's Mask* are the game's real-time aspect and, in turn, its time travel mechanics as well. Due to the game's aforementioned three-day cycle, it becomes necessary for Link to use the Ocarina of Time to travel backwards and forwards as he requires. The entire three-day cycle in-game equates to around an hour in real time and is one of the earliest examples of an accomplished real-time system.

A ranch in the south-west of the game world is obstructed by a large boulder, being hacked at by a builder. Return on the third and final day and the boulder has been removed in a tangible way – it takes the builder two days to destroy it, and so the ranch and its associated side-quests are only available when his task is complete. In turn, heading back into Clock Town towards the end of the last day, the player will find it near empty, as most residents have fled in advance of the impending apocalypse.

By introducing the three-day cycle Nintendo incorporated a wonderful narrative framework and a means to cram a vast experience into a cartridge, as the predetermined environmental occurrences are allowed to repeat themselves infinitely when Link travels back to the dawn of the first day, requiring less memory. Through all of these elements *Majora's Mask* rivalled the acclaim of its predecessor and remains a challenging and curious experience.

GAME CHANGERS

TIME BANDITS

MAJORA'S MASK BROUGHT UNORTHODOX TIME MECHANICS TO THE TABLE, BUT SEVERAL OTHER TITLES OVER THE YEARS HAVE BENT THE RULES OF TIME AND SPACE



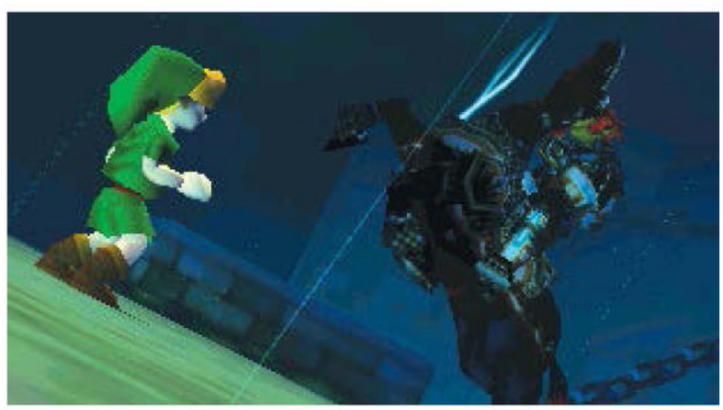
BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER

A GAME THAT was billed as an essential early exclusive for the original Xbox, *Blinx* allowed players to slow down, speed up and stop time altogether using the titular character's vacuum cleaner. What was interesting here was the time limit of ten minutes for each stage, nudging the player into the position where the game's time mechanics weren't just a gimmick, but essential to progression. Outside of these mechanics, however, *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* didn't particularly inspire, amounting to a slightly above average platformer with action elements.



F1 2013

AN INTERESTING ADDITION to this list, yet *F1 2013* uses time mechanics to fix your problems. Having hurtled off the track after a frantic manoeuvre through a corner, players can rewind the action to correct their mistakes. Although the amount of times this function is available is limited, it feels like a strange addition. The *F1* games are known for being hardcore, and by adding this mechanic Codemasters may be guilty of acquiescing to accessibility.



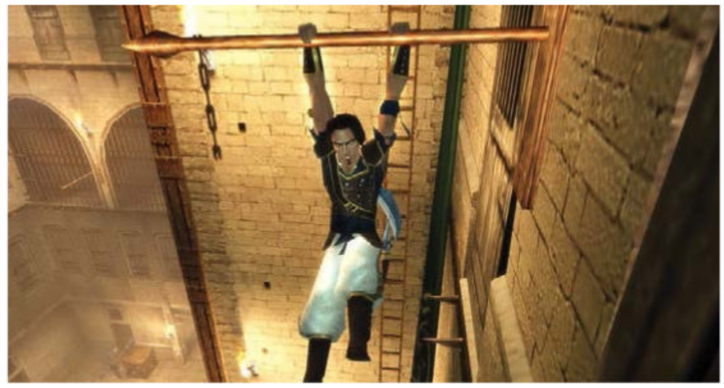
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

THE PREDECESSOR TO *Majora's Mask*, *Ocarina Of Time* allowed players to manipulate time. By heading to the Temple of Time in Hyrule Market Link can remove the Master Sword from its pedestal to travel forward in time. This pushes the narrative forward: by replacing the sword you can return to being a child, affecting what happens in the future, and completing specific side-quests.



CHRONO TRIGGER

■ ANOTHER INNOVATIVE TITLE, and an even earlier example of time travel as a gameplay element. Square's RPG was highly experimental; its time travel component allowed players to travel to different locations and eras, with past events affecting the future. Despite achieving huge success in Japan, a European release for the SNES never happened.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

■ UBISOFT'S ACTION-PLATFORMER was a success upon its release in 2003. Controlling the titular prince, players were faced with dungeons rife with chasms to traverse and enemies to defeat – but the player can rewind time to avoid death. The prince can also use the Dagger of Time to slow time down when attacking enemies, placing the outcome of the fight in the player's hands.



LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII

■ THE FINALE OF the *Final Fantasy XIII* trilogy features a real-time aspect. NPCs are found in different areas at different times, necessitating the need to learn their patterns to maximise their respective side-quests. At 6am on each game day, Lightning can extend the game clock by a day if prerequisites are met, buying the player precious time before the game clock winds down.



BIOSHOCK INFINITE

■ ELIZABETH COMSTOCK'S ABILITY to open tears between dimensions and time periods not only serves as a narrative device but also adds a new dynamic to the gameplay. The stunning FPS deals with particle physics, religious fervour and crippling guilt, but towards the end of the story Elizabeth's mind-bending abilities come to the fore, resulting in the game wandering off down several separate timelines.



BRAID

■ JONATHAN BLOW'S PASSION project became one of the first 'indie darlings' upon its release back in 2008, and played with time in a way that had never been seen before in a side-scrolling 2D platform game. Players guide Tim through screens solving platform puzzles and have the ability to reverse time, even after dying. The effects vary across chapters, resulting in a deep game that became the highest-rated game on Xbox Live for some time.



TIMESHIFT

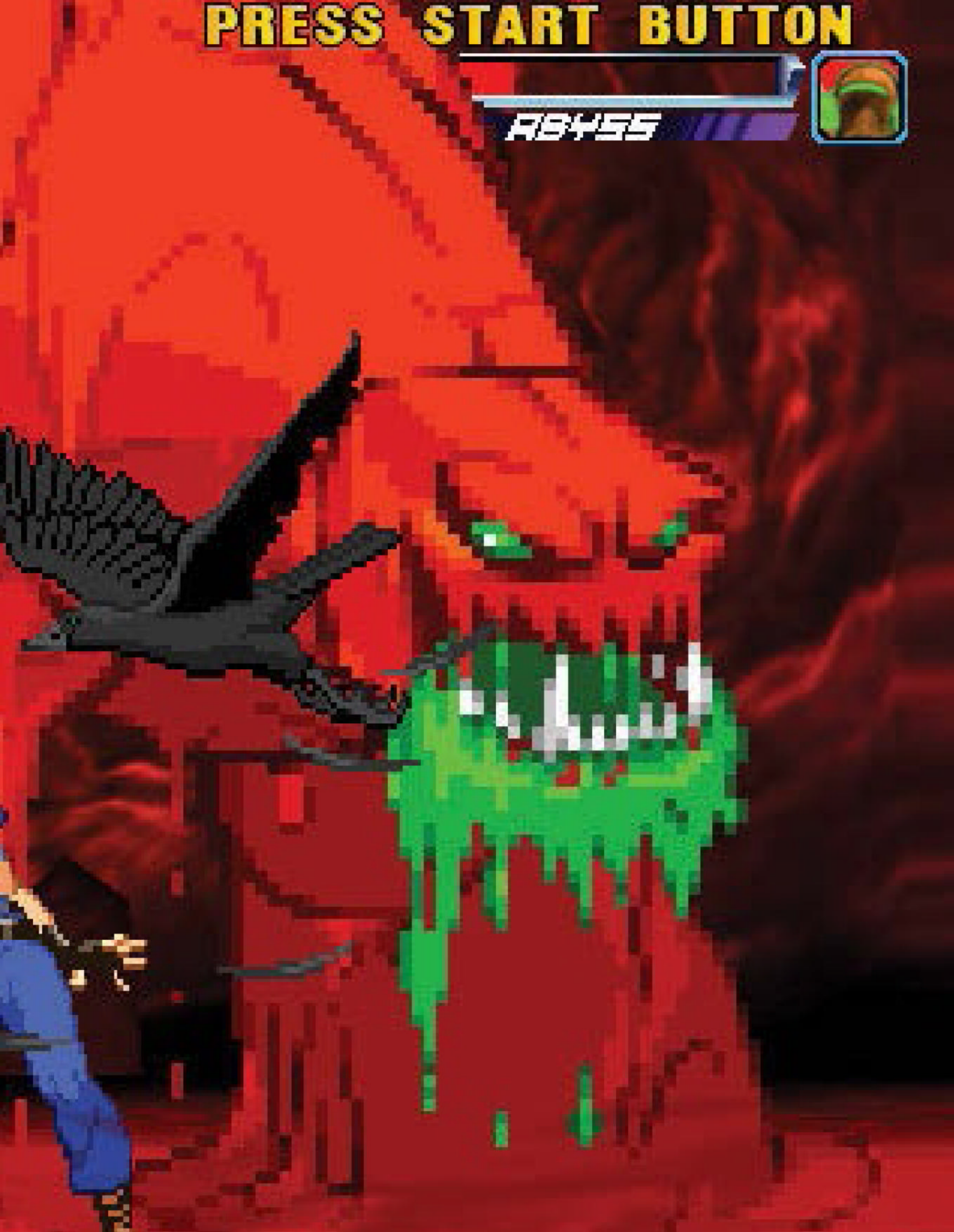
■ PUBLISHED BY SIERRA Entertainment after the project was passed on from Atari, TimeShift charted the actions of Dr Krone, a scientist who travels back to the Thirties and assumes control of society. The player travels back to 1939 to confront Krone and restore natural order, eventually defeating him. The player-character has a time-altering arsenal built-in to the suit the protagonist is wearing, allowing him to slow time, stop it or rewind it.



BEST BOSS

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES DREAMCAST 2000

■ Fighting game bosses are infamously difficult to get right, and *Marvel Vs. Capcom 2*'s Abyss trod the line between well thought-out monstrosity and cheap, shape-shifting irritant. Hellbent on sending the Earth back into a primordial stew, Abyss was more than just a boss, he forced you to learn how to execute all of *Marvel Vs. Capcom*'s different mechanics. His first form required you to master hopping and jumping to avoid his armour suit's slow, sweeping attacks, while his second form (a green humanoid thing) requires ranged attacks to counteract his paralyzing projectiles. The third and final demon Abyss (pictured) relies on brute strength and spamming energy beam attacks – twitch guarding and taking advantage of recovery frame-rates is the only way to dominate here. Abyss can be a horrible experience, but if you know how to pick him apart, he can be taken down hard.


PRESS START BUTTON
ABYSS







INTERVIEW

THE PICKFORD BROTHERS

With more than 25 years of experience in the industry, Ste and John Pickford have seen it all. Having worked for themselves and for others, they discuss their careers so far

It was a partnership that started almost by accident. Ste had ambitions to pursue a career as a comic book designer while older brother John had been taken by 8-bit computers and was becoming an accomplished coder. But with Ste finding himself working at the same games development company as John and with both becoming disillusioned, they decided to collaborate in October 1986. So one of gaming's most enduring sibling pairings formed. The duo have been credited on dozens of games including *Zub*, *Rasterscan*, *Plok* and *Magnetic Billiards*. They've worked for Rare, Software Creations and Binary Design and set up three of their own studios: Zippo, Zed-Two and Zee-3. Having been part of the thought process behind industry body TIGA, the Pickford Bros are coming up with great ideas to this day.

Ste, you started 'life' as a comic book designer. Why did illustration interest you?

Ste Pickford: I just wanted to be a comic artist as I was a kid. I loved comics. It started with the standard British humour weeklies and DC Comics like *Superman* that our local newsagent stocked, then I was captivated by the Marvel UK black and white reprints of *Spider-Man*, *Hulk*, and *Star Wars*. In my early teens I was much more interested in comics like *Warrior* and *Swamp Thing* than I was in computer games.

How was it that you first got involved with computers?

SP: I always wanted to get on John's computer and I did a bit of programming when he'd let me on his Spectrum or Amstrad. I drew some pictures using a drawing 'package' he wrote but I had no career ambitions to work with computers.

When did you get your first computer, John, and what fascinated you about them?

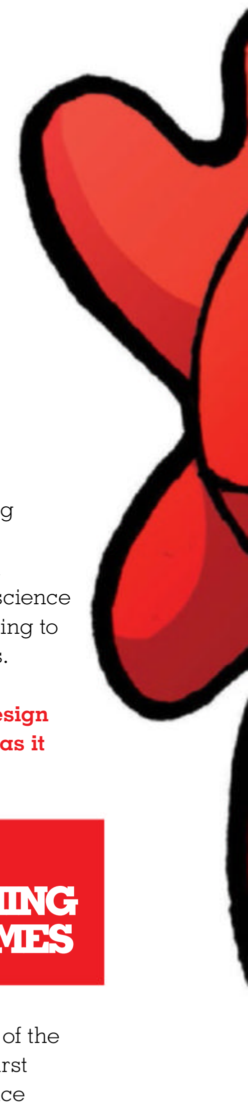
John Pickford: I got a ZX81 for Christmas. Back then, just having control over the image on a TV was an amazing thing (I'm thinking, the original *Pong* style videogames) so to actually type and program was like something out of science fiction to me. I don't recall ever wanting to do anything other than make games.

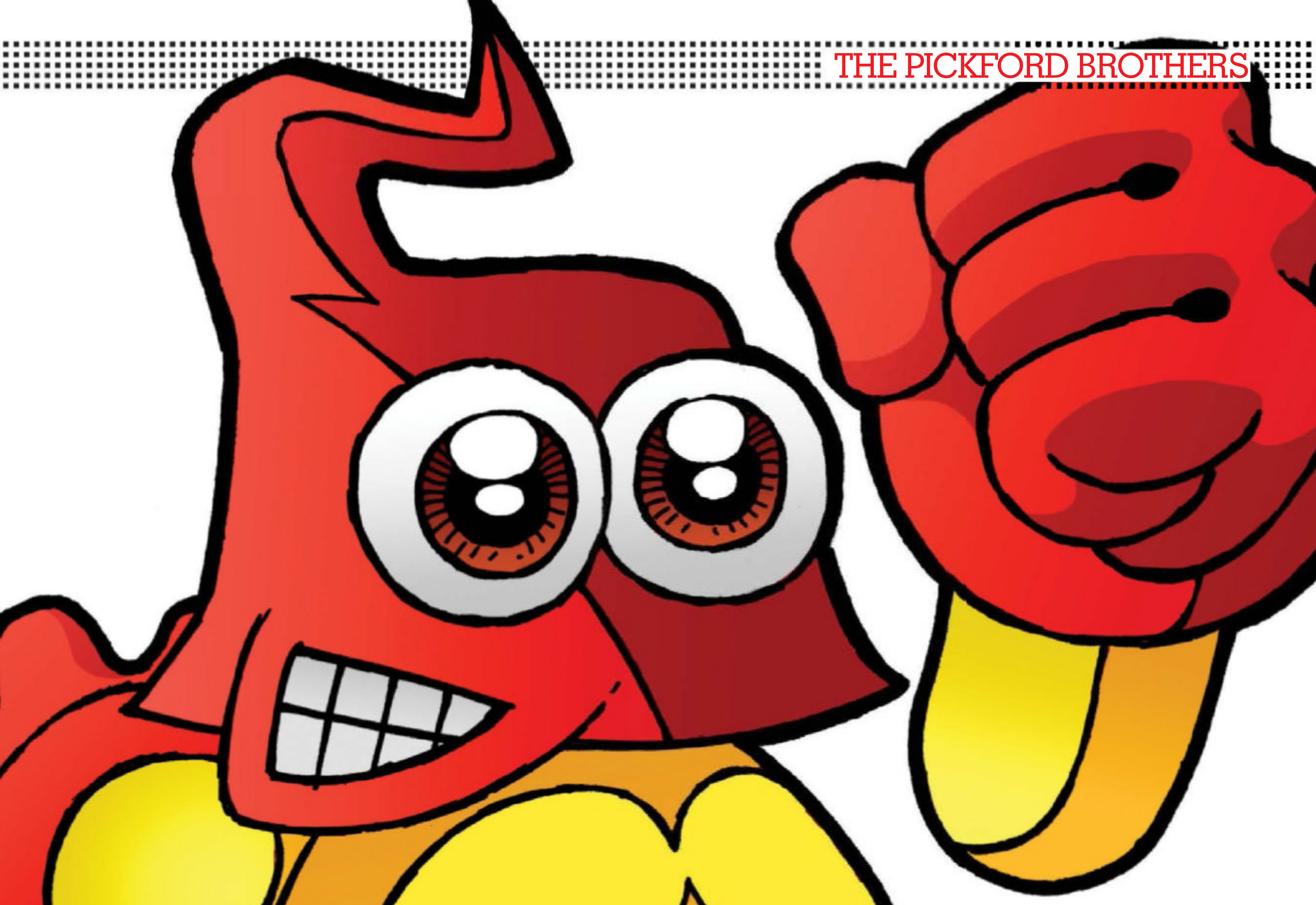
John, you went to went to Binary Design first and Ste followed later. What was it like in those early days?

I DONT RECALL EVER WANTING TO DO ANYTHING OTHER THAN MAKE GAMES

SP: John was hired to be one of the programmers forming the very first team. I went there for work experience about a year later.

JP: It was a lot of fun, hard work and a great learning experience. On the first day I had to pluck up the courage to ask my boss, Mike Webb, a question which would have revealed I didn't know Z80 assembly language all that well. Thankfully, Mike is







DEVELOPER COMMENTS



■■■ MY BIGGEST REGRET regarding the Pickford brothers is that I've never actually had the privilege of working directly with them. They've been around this industry for as long as I can remember and I've always admired them, not just for their creativity and great games, but also because they have never ever sold out on their principles. They are the absolute epitome of what an indie developer represents and I do believe that there is so much many fledgling studios could learn from Ste and John. The Pickfords are talented, creative, uncompromising, passionate about games (and the industry itself) but most of all, very beardy. Top, top blokes.

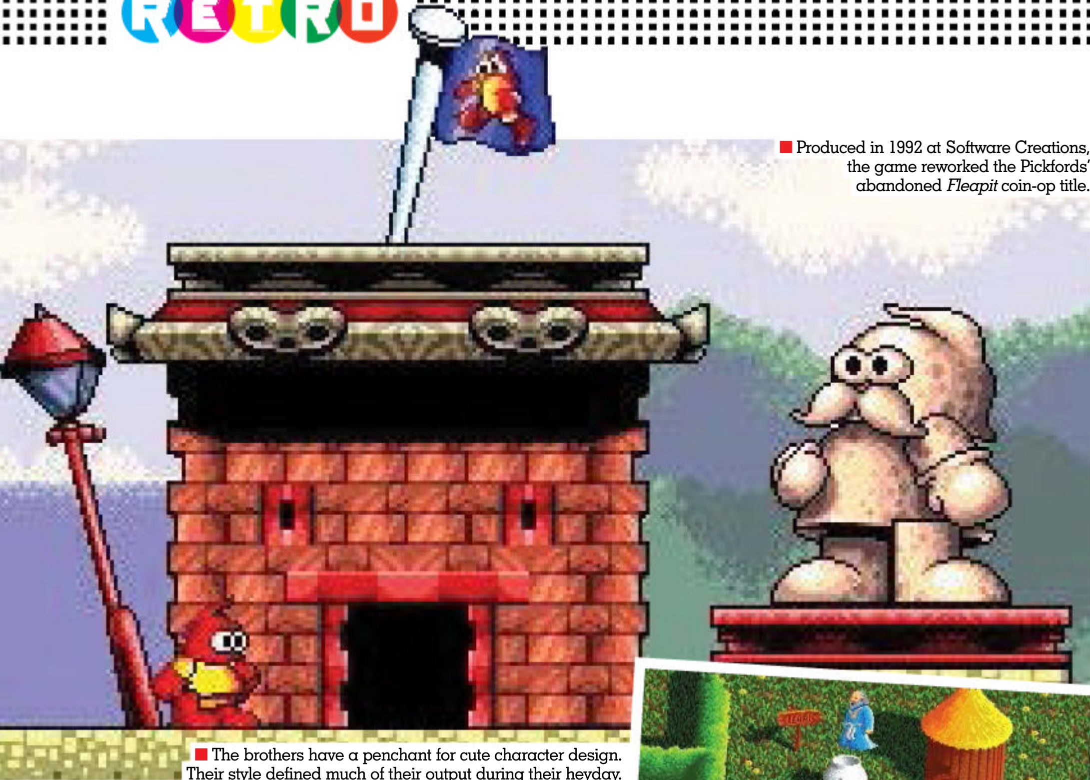
GARY BRACEY, FORMER DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR OF MANCHESTER-BASED OCEAN SOFTWARE



■ Shoot-em-up *Zub* was created for Mastertronic and it was the first game both Ste and John worked on together.



■ *Magnetic Billiards* is the Pickford Brothers' most recent acclaimed game. It was nominated at the gaming BAFTAs in the Mobile & Handheld category.



■ Produced in 1992 at Software Creations, the game reworked the Pickfords' abandoned *Fleapit* coin-op title.

■ The brothers have a penchant for cute character design. Their style defined much of their output during their heyday.

a really cool bloke and an amazing coder and he didn't bat an eyelid. He just helped me out and everything went pretty well after that. I was proud of the fact that my version of the game, *DeathWake* on Spectrum, was the first to be completed. I think it took about 12 weeks. Might have been a bit longer. I don't recall ever not being a bit late.

SP: I loved it at Binary Design. I was messing about with pixels all day, drawing pictures on the screen or daft little animations. I found the work really interesting as there was lots of problem solving and inventing of systems and processes. If tools and platforms and pipelines ever become stable, and there's no need to invent anything in order to make a game, that's the point when I'll lose interest in making videogames.

What sort of games did you enjoy playing?

SP: There weren't strict genres of games back then, so games were much more interesting in many ways. Each new game – or each good one – was practically inventing a new genre, or at least inventing elements of a genre. I just enjoyed anything that was good. Standout games for me were probably *Lords Of Midnight*, all the Ultimate Games, the Hewson Spectrum games, the Costa Panayi Spectrum Games, *Elite*, *Tir Na Nog*... Well, the list could be endless.

JP: I've never been good at twitch games so I think the ones I enjoyed most had an RPG element. *Elite* is an obvious choice but I think my favourite was *Avalon* (and *Dragontorc*) by Steve Turner. Amazing atmosphere in that game. I remember being fascinated by *Tir Na Nog*, which also had a quite magical feel, but I don't think got anywhere or solved a single puzzle.



Did you find that gaming was a lucrative industry to get into?

SP: While I was still at school I worked on *Ghosts'n Goblins* as a freelance project for the programmer of the game, Nigel Alderton. I think he paid me £50, which made me feel rich. But I was paid £5,500 a year when I started work in 1986. That was brilliant for a 16-year-old school leaver. I originally planned to work in games for a year, then go to art college and head off in the direction of comics, but after a few months of being loaded, and being able to buy whatever I fancied and go to the pub whenever I wanted, there was no way I was going to go back and be a skint student, so I just carried on with the games.

Did you do work 'on the side' too?

SP: There were loads of opportunities for 'foreigners' once I'd started at Binary. English Software were just round the corner, and my manager, David Whittaker, took me round to meet the owner, Phil 'English' as we used to call him, one lunch time. Phil used to give me little graphics jobs for his games that I'd do in the evenings or weekends for an extra £100 here and there, so yeah, it felt lucrative to me as a teenager.

The first game you both collaborated on was *Zub*. How did you find working together? Were there any sibling rows?

SP: I don't recall any rows, but it was odd that we hadn't worked on a game together before that. I think by that time we'd both, separately, had experiences where things hadn't gone quite as we'd hoped with the artist or programmer we'd been working with so with *Zub* it felt like we were both good at what we were doing and we could make something really good together.

And then Zippo Games. Was it a big leap from designer to company owners?

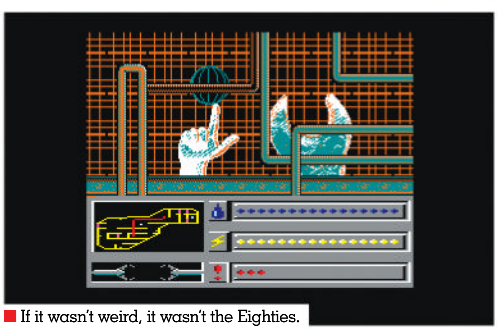
SP: Yeah, we started to understand that just making a good game wasn't enough. We got direct experience of the snide ways that publishers would rip you off and dick you about, and what a weak position game developers were in the business environment of the time. And today, really.

That was the way, then, wasn't it? Talented programmers and designers going their own way.

SP: We were probably later than most. I think a lot of the big name 8-bit game devs were freelance or worked for themselves or ran little studios. John and I were just employees at a work-for-hire studio, which was actually more unusual than working for yourself or running your own business. So I think by going our own way after Binary Design, we were doing things backwards.

Which consoles did you enjoy playing on and developing for?

SP: We formed Zippo Games partly because we wanted to work on the fancy new 16-bit machines – the Atari ST and the



■ If it wasn't weird, it wasn't the Eighties.



■ John Pickford did not actually program *Feud*. Created after *Zub*, John's role was to design the game for others to code.

Amiga – so that's where our interest lay initially. It was when we went to see Rare that we were introduced to the NES, and at first we weren't impressed. It seemed like an underpowered Commodore 64 in some ways and felt like a backwards step.

It was Tim and Chris Stamper who converted us into console fans – and Nintendo fans – by impressing upon us how much more polished, well designed, playable, bug-free, and just plain more fun the games were than anything on the Amiga or ST. We were sceptical, but after sitting down with *Mario* and *Zelda* and *RC Pro-AM* and *Excitebike* and a few others, we had to agree that these games were head and shoulders above what we were making.

You worked for Rare too. Which of your games did you feel stood out?
SP: I think *Solar Jetman* is probably our best from that period. I was very hopeful that *Wizards And Warriors 3* would be something special, and I did a ton of design work that I was very proud of, but I left the studio before it was complete. I think it was a bit rushed towards the end, so I'm not sure the end result was what I was aiming for.
JP: We got to work on Rare's prototype coin-op hardware, the Razz Board. That was a lot of fun and the game we made – *Fleapit* – was the basis of what became *Plok* on SNES.

Why did you sell to Rare?
SP: We were skint and completely reliant on them. We didn't so much sell to them, it was more that we couldn't keep the studio running on what they were paying us, so they took us over and took on our financial obligations in order for us to keep making the games they wanted.

Did you feel you lost some control?
SP: Their attitude to us changed overnight, it was really funny. When we were a separate studio we'd go down for meetings with Chris and Tim, talk about our projects then discuss games in general and the state of the industry and we all got on great. The moment we were employees the meetings stopped, and we'd be sent 'directives' from Twycross telling us things like 'no walkmans are allowed on desks' and other bizarre rules that were related to how their internal office politics were working. It instantly became miserable.

You worked for Software Creations. By now you were very well respected and people watched out for your games.
SP: I think John and I were well known within the Manchester game dev scene but I'm not sure our fame went anywhere beyond that little world. We were hired by Creations to work on their new SNES devkit and make their first SNES game, *Equinox*. It's a real shame what happened with that project, as it was a massive missed opportunity.

I STILL LOVE THE PROCESS OF MAKING VIDEOGAMES, BUT IT'S BECOME TOUGH TO MAKE A LIVING

What happened?
SP: We designed a full RPG, halfway between a *Zelda* game and a proper RPG like *Dragon Warrior*. We had towns and NCPs, loads of dialogue and quests and funny running jokes. Game development was tracking about two or three months late which was hardly surprising as we were learning a new platform, so the brutal decision was made to chop out all of the RPG layer of the game, even though it had all been designed, scripted, translated and was ready to implement. Each town entrance on the world map became just a dungeon entrance, skipping the NPCs and puzzles in the town that would have eventually revealed that entrance, and we had to bodge these 'ghosts' on the world map bridges to box off areas of the world map that would have been controlled by more interesting puzzles and NPCs. It was a real hatchet job, just to stop the game being about three months late.



Puzzle title *Wetrix* was the first game designed by the Pickfords for their Zed Two studio.

This new RPG game was delayed further, wasn't it?
SP: A problem with Nintendo approval, related to the isometric 3D, sprite priorities, and a bug in the SNES hardware meant the game was delayed by Nintendo for over a year in submission hell before it was released. So we could easily have got the full RPG in there without actually impacting the release date. What makes it such a shame is that if the game as designed had come out, it would have been Sony's own RPG franchise. This was before PlayStation. So, when PlayStation launched, we would be the guys making Sony's main first-party RPG games. That's typical of the luck we've had.

Why did you leave SC to form Zed 2?
SP: We wanted to form a small team to focus on making good games, which was very different to the direction Creations was going in. They were doing big *FIFA* conversions for EA and that kind of thing. We tried to form a group within Creations to do that, but they wouldn't go with it, so we left to do it anyway as our own studio. It was pretty much the exact same reason why we left Binary Design to form Zippo.

At Zippo, you worked on 8/16-bit games. How did you find creating for consoles?
SP: It was still just about possible for little studios to make console games when we did *Wetrix*, before the doors were closed to the little guys for a long time. Only in the last few years, with online stores and downloadable games is it possible for tiny studios to get their games on consoles.

You've had some amazing successes recently. Why has *Magnetic Billiards* been so acclaimed, do you think?
SP: Haha, we haven't had any success at all! *Magnetic Billiards* has been critically acclaimed, and a lot of people like it, but it's not been anything like a commercial success. Just the opposite so far…
JP: This time next year, Rodders!



The Pickfords work from home in Greater Manchester.



BEST INTRO

ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE

PLAYSTATION **1997**

"THIS IS RUPTURE FARMS," says a nasal voice, resigned and forlorn. A mournful and haunting soundtrack plays in the background as industrial machines rumble, bloody cuts of meat are torn apart, bonesaws cut at splintered ribs. Lines of Mudokons – the enslaved race of the protagonist, Abe – stand like automata, performing their tasks with resignation, some with mouths or eyes sewn shut. Abe explains the entrapment of his people under the capitalist Glukkon. Abe reflects on the delicious snacks Rupture Farms have created, before stumbling upon a secret that would turn his world upside-down forever – that the Glukkon intend to make Mudokons into a new line of savoury treat… The industrial and modern-gothic themes enacted by the striking intro to the *Oddworld* series set up the themes for what would become one of the PlayStation's most iconic (and hard as nails) series.


SCRAB
CAKES
and



THE RETRO GUIDE TO... FINAL FANTASY

The leading name in Japanese RPGs, Final Fantasy has enjoyed a rich and varied run, spanning nearly three decades, and serving up some genuine all-time classics along the way

IT'S AMAZING TO think that one final act of desperation on behalf of a developer losing faith in gaming as a medium managed to spawn one of the longest-running franchises, but that's exactly what happened. Today, *Final Fantasy* is the biggest franchise in the JRPG arena and one of Japan's most successful ever gaming exports, enjoying a level of success that few other series can boast. The upcoming *Final Fantasy XV* might suggest that only 14 games have come before it, but the actual number – as you're about to discover – is significantly greater. Hop on your chocobo and let's get this epic quest underway…

FINAL FANTASY 1987

SYSTEM: NES

Squaresoft's Hironobu Sakaguchi had long been petitioning his bosses to let him make an RPG, but it wasn't until Enix saw success with *Dragon Quest* in 1986 that Squaresoft finally saw that there was indeed a market for console RPGs and green-lit the project. While it shared a lot tonally and in terms of setting with *Dragon Quest*, Western influences from the likes of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Wizardry* offered deeper character progression and combat elements that would go on to become staples of the franchise, as well as introducing many to the outstanding scoring of Nobuo Uematsu. The game's title reflected not only Squaresoft's financial instability at the time but also Sakaguchi's own sentiments – had the game flopped, he reportedly planned to leave gaming altogether. While its failure could have taken its parent company down with it, the game's initial print run of 200,000 copies had to be doubled to meet demand. It has since been re-released no less than 17 times across various platforms, finally arriving in Europe for the first time in 2003 on PSone.



FINAL FANTASY II 1988

SYSTEM: NES

After the unexpected success of the original game, Sakaguchi and his team were tasked with turning around a speedy sequel in order to fully capitalise on its popularity. Despite arriving within a year of the first game's release, *FFII* still managed to take some bold strides forward – battle scenes were no longer so heavily windowed and felt more dynamic as a result, while franchise staples such as chocobo mounts and recurring character Cid also made their debut here. Since the US release of the original was something of a flop commercially, this sequel would not be localised for the first time until 2003, for PlayStation compilation *Final Fantasy Origins.*







FINAL FANTASY III 1990

SYSTEM: NES

Clearly onto a winner in Japan, Square continued to churn out sequels but again, this was far more than a simple cash grab. *FFIII* further refined the series' battle system, doing away with damage details as captions and instead working them into the visual representation of the fight, in turn allowing more space for the improved combat graphics to shine. The original's job system was greatly improved by allowing all playable characters to switch between multiple roles unlocked as the game progressed, lending players a degree of customisation and personalisation they had not enjoyed up to this point. It was also the first game to feature summons. Once again, though, no localisation was available until long after release – in this case, it took until the 2006 DS remake for an official non-Japanese version to be launched.





FINAL FANTASY IV 1991

SYSTEM: SNES

Here's where it starts to get a little complicated. With only the original game having been available in the US, this SNES debut instead released as *Final Fantasy II* so as to avoid confusion. Working with new hardware proved to be a double-edged sword for the team – the overly ambitious script came in at around four times too long for what the capacity of the cartridge would allow, although the improved fidelity would allow character emotions to be conveyed visually to a degree and it was largely cut without omitting any intended story beats. *FFIV* marks the shift from simple turn-based combat to the series' trademark Active Time Battle system, although its implementation is basic in comparison to subsequent titles. The job system was simplified once again to lock characters into a single role, but these roles were better defined thanks to the addition of class-specific abilities and commands. Mode-7 effects were employed for the first time to make airship travel and spell effects even more impressive.



FINAL FANTASY V 1992

SYSTEM: SNES

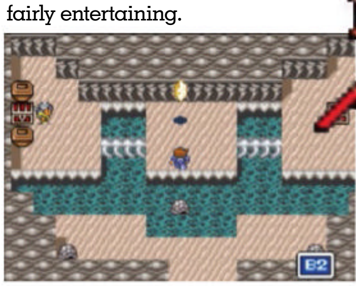
The job system flip-flop continues as fixed classes are done away with once again to make room for the most complex and intricate version of the system seen to date. That's largely why the game didn't get to leave Japan too, mind – it was seen as being far too hardcore for the Western market and at least three known attempts to localise it under different names all fell through. It's such a shame, since the awesome job system and refined ATB mechanics (progress bars were added to show who would be acting next) have since led to this being a series favourite for many the world over.

FFV WAS SEEN AS BEING TOO HARDCORE FOR THE WESTERN MARKET – THREE KNOWN ATTEMPTS TO LOCALISE IT FELL THROUGH

FINAL FANTASY MYSTIC QUEST 1993

SYSTEM: SNES

The first spin-offs came a few years previous on Game Boy, but this was the earliest one released on a home console. Almost the antithesis of *FFV*, it's a hybrid of *Zelda*-esque action RPG elements and a simple turn-based combat system where you never have control of more than two characters. In fact, you only actually have one by default – the game takes control of partner characters unless you switch to manual override. An entry-level JRPG and not a true *Final Fantasy* title, but still fairly entertaining.





FINAL FANTASY VI 1994

SYSTEM: SNES

Vastly improved visuals and a simpler character development system meant that this would not be denied a US visa as its forerunner so rudely was, but that only caused more confusion – *VI* was actually released in the US as *Final Fantasy III* to maintain numbering traditions. It's here that we first see a lot of the complexities that later become commonplace in the series, such as events where several parties must be formed and used separately, and choice as to the order in which certain scenarios play out. Widely regarded as the best game in the series, *FFVI* is unquestionably as good as 16-bit RPGs get so if you haven't played it, get on that – mechanically, it holds up brilliantly even by today's genre standards, the sprite-based visuals are timeless and Uematsu's score is simply god-tier.







FINAL FANTASY VII 1997

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

The leap from 16-bit to 32-bit hardware was one of the greatest the industry had ever seen and few franchises had a greater degree of ambition and potential to truly come of age here than *Final Fantasy* – sprawling epics like *V* and *VI* came in at under 4MB a pop, whereas *VII* would span three 700MB CDs. Characters made the jump from sprites to full 3D models, while backdrops were pre-rendered CG as was popular in games at the time to help them punch above their weight visually. The first *FF* to reach Europe is respected for other reasons, too; its setting, characters, themes, narrative and score are all benchmarks that modern RPGs have struggled to match for years and the ingenious Materia system offered all the depth of *FFV*'s job system and more for those who wanted it, while at the same time being simple enough on a base level to allow anyone to bluff their way through with enough old-school grinding. FMV sequences gave us a truly cinematic way to understand and engage with these characters, which is a huge part of what makes this the *FF* many swear by to this day.



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS 1997

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

■ Trading the traditional RPG action for another 16-bit staple, *Tactics* laid on 3D grid-based arenas in which to do battle in line with strategy RPGs such as *Tactics Ogre*, *Fire Emblem* and *Super Robot Wars* that had proven popular in Japan. In fact, a large chunk of the *Tactics Ogre* team actually worked on *FFT*, making it easy to see where similarities came from. Still, the in-depth job system and interesting twist on the main series' ATB mechanic lent this its own personality, leading to a number of indirect sequels. The game's world, Ivalice, would also go on to be the setting for *FFXII*.



FINAL FANTASY VIII 1999

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

■ *FFVII* was the series' first step towards realistic visuals but *VIII* took that a step further. The result is a game that feels less stylised and as a result arguably doesn't hold up as well today, but it's still a popular pick in 'Best *FF*' polls. It's perhaps the first truly divisive game in the series, however – many couldn't get on with the unique Draw/Junction system for earning spells and upgrading characters, nor with the diversion from more traditional fantasy themes seen in older games. Whatever your take on the game itself, though, the Triple Triad card game still remains the best mini-game to ever have featured in the franchise. The infectious music (and impending threat of the Random rule spreading) still haunt us to this day.

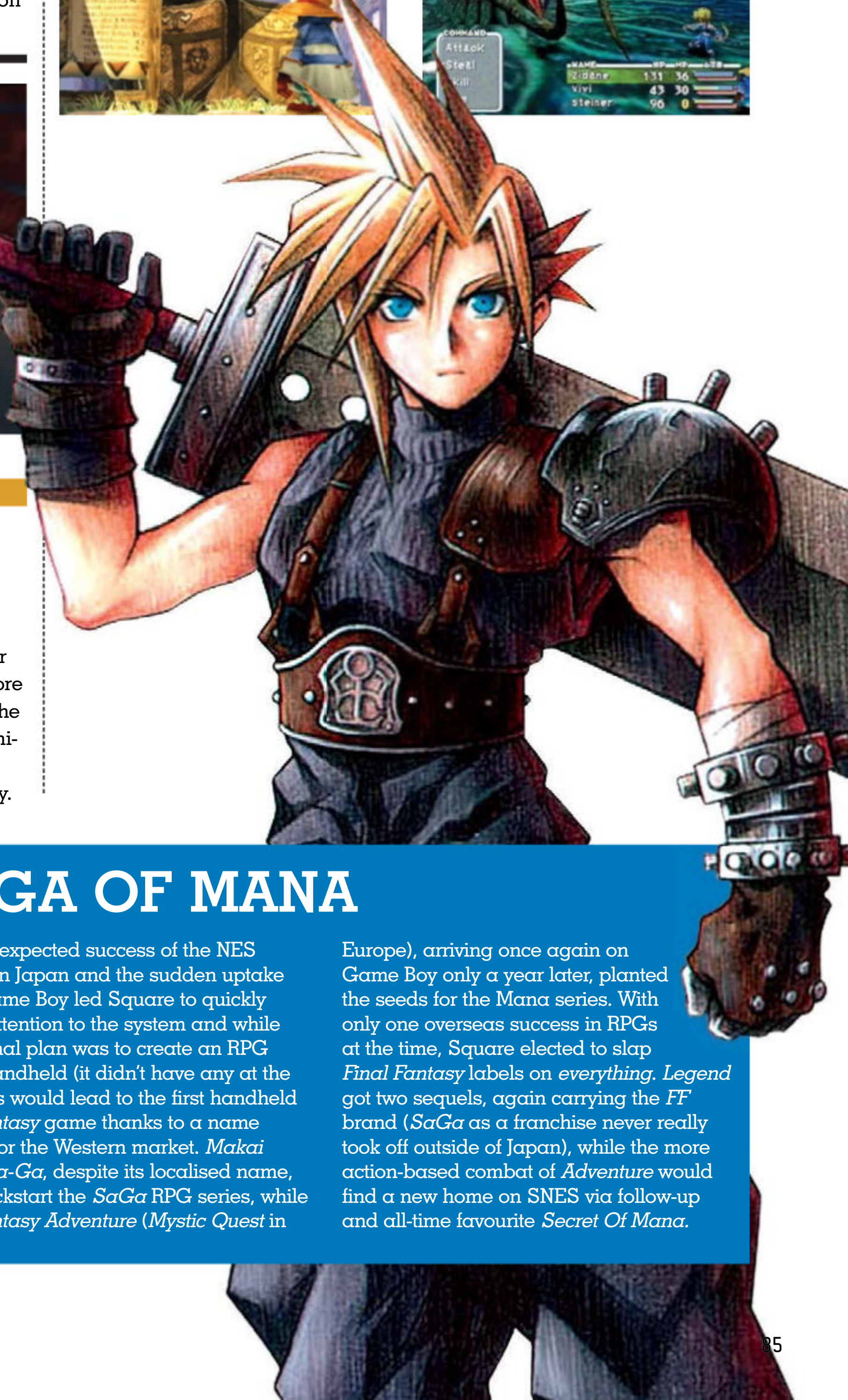
FINAL FANTASY IX 2000

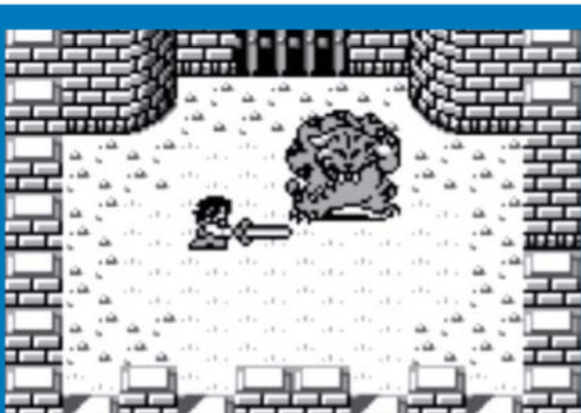
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

■ Sakaguchi's final entry as producer couldn't carry his unique style and approach any more proudly – it's little wonder he has been known to cite this as his favourite *FF*. A return to classic fantasy, this also saw the series go back to designated roles for each character rather than having a Materia or Junction-style system that opened up options for players. It's a little simpler as a result and while we'd suggest that this makes it the weakest of the PlayStation trio, there are plenty of fans who would like to Ultima us right in the face for suggesting such. So yeah, try it for yourself – the stylised looks help it hold up better today than *FFVIII* from a graphical standpoint, at least.









SAGA OF MANA

■ The unexpected success of the NES original in Japan and the sudden uptake of the Game Boy led Square to quickly turn its attention to the system and while the original plan was to create an RPG for the handheld (it didn't have any at the time), this would lead to the first handheld *Final Fantasy* game thanks to a name change for the Western market. *Makai Toushi Sa-Ga*, despite its localised name, would kickstart the *SaGa* RPG series, while *Final Fantasy Adventure* (*Mystic Quest* in Europe), arriving once again on Game Boy only a year later, planted the seeds for the Mana series. With only one overseas success in RPGs at the time, Square elected to slap *Final Fantasy* labels on *everything*. *Legend* got two sequels, again carrying the *FF* brand (*SaGa* as a franchise never really took off outside of Japan), while the more action-based combat of *Adventure* would find a new home on SNES via follow-up and all-time favourite *Secret Of Mana*.



FINAL FANTASY X 2001

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

■ Another generation leap brought with it huge potential for change and, once again, Square embraced the challenge. Results, it must be said, were somewhat mixed, though the game itself is strong enough to carry it regardless. Full 3D environments replaced the rendered backgrounds of old, while characters were far more detailed on the new console than ever before. Both FMV sequences and audio quality also saw improvements, although the switch to fully voiced dialogue was both too much for many that loved imagining classic RPG character voices as they would the faces of characters in books and also a weak link in general – one scene in particular is laughably bad (pun very much intended), but the general budget anime dub feel of the rest still jars somewhat with the otherwise stellar production values. Also, Blitzball. So much Blitzball…



FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE 2002

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Having seen the popularity of Western MMOs at the time, Square was keen to deliver its own alternative and had just the brand with which to do it. While having a main series title deviate so radically from the solo JRPG template upon which its storied legacy was built, one of the main things fans came to love about the game was how much lore from and love for previous *FF* titles was evident. *XI* boasts many firsts – first 'proper' console MMO, first cross-play MMO, first Xbox 360 MMO and first online *Final Fantasy*, to name but a few – but the one Square will be most interested in wasn't announced until 2012, when it was revealed that *FFXI* is the most profitable game in the entire series. Yeah, a decade of recurring subscriptions and an addictive gameplay model will do that…

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES 2003

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE

■ Given that Nintendo's pint-sized console didn't have the online clout for an MMO or the storage capacity for a full-on epic RPG, Square had to get a little creative. This four-player spin-off relies on far more action-heavy combat than main series games had previously, while also offering some ingenious new features to make multiplayer the best way to play – by charging attacks or spells with the right timing, you could combine multiple attacks into a single far more powerful blow, making coordination among players crucial to success.





FINAL FANTASY X-2 2003

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

■ The game that started a dangerous trend for Square. We can't say that we particularly wanted a direct sequel to *FFX* but even if we had, we're not sure this strange playable *Charlie's Angels* anime would have been entirely what we were after. Odd though it may be, the Dress Sphere system (for switching jobs by changing outfits, naturally) works well enough and the monster training/battling mechanics, while hardly *Pokémon*, are also fit for purpose. It's just a shame *that* intro put so many people off what is actually a decent, if unremarkable, *Final Fantasy* spin-off.

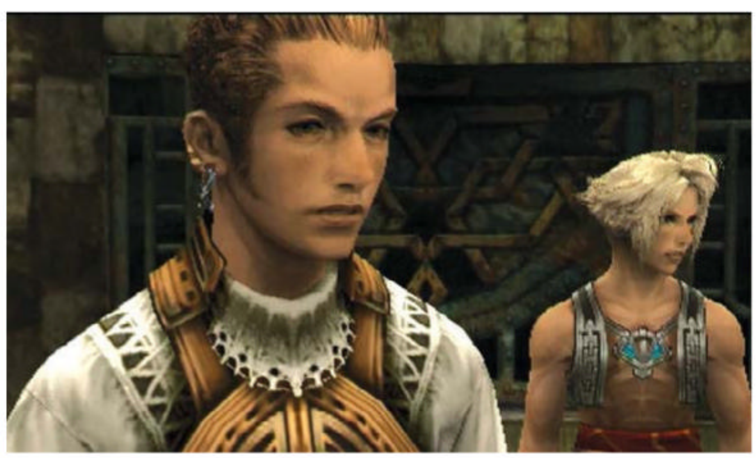
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE 2003

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

■ What a smart play this was. Spotting that the GBA was the first handheld powerful enough to run and display a modern SRPG and that the *Tactics* formula was a perfect fit for handhelds, Square served up a near-endless strategic delight. Judges invoke Laws, which change the way each battle must be played, making it impossible to rely on the same handful of overpowered characters or abilities in all circumstances – it's all about thinking on the fly, which is precisely what you want from a tactics game.







FINAL FANTASY XII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

You can tell just from playing it that *XII* is a game created by a team with MMO experience – to all intents and purposes, this is a single-player MMO in much of its approach, design and combat. The Gambit system grows in strength as the game goes on, starting out as a way to have struggling characters quaff Potions in a pinch but ultimately developing into a system of such complexity that you can pretty much code your party to act independently and rarely even require your input. Many design decisions showcase a time where developers were trying their best to prevent trade-ins while retailers looked to upsell with guides and such – in one of the rudest RPG missables of all time, Vaan's ultimate weapon can only be obtained if you leave a handful of select chests around the world unopened, something that probably wouldn't have been discovered to this day if it weren't for the official strategy guide. Japan got a greatly enhanced version of the game in the form of the International Zodiac Job System version, which we'd love to see localised in HD form as the team has done recently with the updated versions of *X-2* and the *Kingdom Hearts* games.

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII 2006

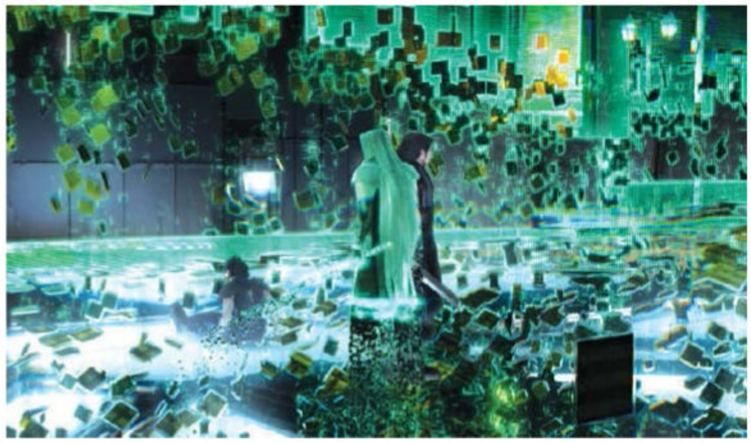
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

The less said about this the better, so we'll keep this brief. Missing the point of both newly appointed lead character Vincent Valentine and *VII* itself, this turgid shooter made it abundantly clear that the old adage is indeed true – you can't please all the people all the time. Series fans were let down by janky gameplay with only loose ties to *FF* canon while shooter fans were left raising their eyebrows at the wildly convoluted narrative and bizarre structure. Nobody had a nice time, basically.









CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

A far more fitting tribute to the *FFVII* legacy than *Dirge Of Cerberus*, this PSP action-RPG does a great job of fleshing out the back-story of the PSone classic. With Zack stepping into the starring role, you're able to experience first hand what it's like to actually be a SOLDIER badass, which proved to be enough of a hook to keep us playing. It certainly didn't hurt that it was one of the best-looking games on PSP, and strong sales reflected both that and its core quality.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2: GRIMOIRE OF THE RIFT 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

It worked well enough on GBA, so why not do it all over again on DS? While still solid, *A2* was faced with stiff competition on the immensely popular Nintendo handheld, the likes of *Disgaea*, *Front Mission* and *Advance Wars* already staking their claim on the system around the time the *FF* sequel rocked onto the scene. Iteration rather than innovation is core here – it's basically the same great strategy game, only with a few tweaks.





FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

In a world where sequels to mainline *Final Fantasy* games were considered okay, a follow-up to hugely successful PS2 swansong *XII* was always on the cards. Few could have predicted the form it would take, though – this curious RTS neither looks nor feels like the game it supposedly follows on from, although summoning armies of Espers proved pretty neat even when taken in isolation.

ANOTHER GENERATION LEAP BROUGHT WITH IT HUGE POTENTIAL AND, ONCE AGAIN, SQUARE EMBRACED THE CHALLENGE



KWEH AS FOLK

It didn't take long after their introduction for chocobos to go from supporting characters to starring roles, with the global success of *Final Fantasy VII* kicking off a wave of bird-based spin-offs. The *Fushigi no Dungeon* series started off as a *Dragon Quest* spin-off, so it's somewhat fitting that Square should send its own RPG brand to copy Enix's once more. But *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon* was just the start – PlayStation owners had dungeoneering sequels, bizarre kart racers and even PocketStation mini-games before the chocobos went off to graze in new pastures like the WonderSwan, mobiles and later the DS and Wii. There have now been almost 20 *Chocobo* games spanning all number of genres – here's how it all played out for the unlikely critter heroes. Kweh!

- **CHOCOBO'S MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON**
  YEAR: 1997 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON 2**
  YEAR: 1999 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO RACING**
  YEAR: 1999 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO COLLECTION**
  YEAR: 1999 **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **CHOCOBO ON THE JOB**
  YEAR: 2000 **SYSTEM:** WONDERSWAN
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE**
  YEAR: 2002 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO LAND: A GAME OF DICE**
  YEAR: 2002 **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 2: ESCAPE! GHOST SHIP**
  YEAR: 2003 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCO-MATE**
  YEAR: 2003 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 2.5: INFILTRATE! ANCIENT RUINS**
  YEAR: 2004 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 3: DEFEAT! THE GREAT RAINBOW-COLORED DEMON**
  YEAR: 2004 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO DE MOBILE**
  YEAR: 2006 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO TALES**
  YEAR: 2006 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON**
  YEAR: 2007 **SYSTEM:** WII
- **CID AND CHOCOBO'S MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON**
  YEAR: 2008 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **CHOCOBO AND THE MAGIC PICTURE BOOK**
  YEAR: 2008 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **CHOCOBO PANIC**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** IOS
- **CHOCOBO'S CRYSTAL TOWER**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **CHOCOBO'S CHOCOTTO FARM**
  YEAR: 2012 **SYSTEM:** IOS

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: RING OF FATES 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

A handheld prequel to the GameCube title, *Ring Of Fates* shares much with the game it so clearly emulates. Played alone, it lacks a lot of the depth of the original but it won some respect back by extending the multiplayer component across oceans via Wi-Fi play. Sadly, with Nintendo shutting down online support for original DS games, you'll need to find a group of other owners to play locally to enjoy that side of the game today.





FINAL FANTASY IV: THE AFTER YEARS 2008

SYSTEM: VARIOUS



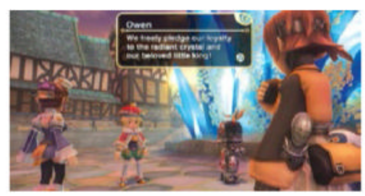
The sequels keep on coming, although it's clear that less effort went into this strange episodic effort than into many of the others. Assets are largely reused from the various remakes of the SNES game and despite a few interesting new mechanics (such as a lunar cycle that affects combat), it's still an extra chapter to a book many would be happy to simply leave closed or read fresh.

DISSIDIA FINAL FANTASY 2008

SYSTEM: PSP

What if all of the most famous characters in *Final Fantasy* history were to get together for some arbitrary reason and have a big fight? That's the question posed and, to a lesser degree, answered by *Dissidia*, a curious mix of arcade brawling and RPG mechanics. It looks great and plays well enough, but it's best seen as entertaining fan service – it's basically *Final Fantasy*'s answer to *Smash Bros.*, and you likely already know if you'd enjoy that or not.





FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: MY LIFE AS A KING 2008

SYSTEM: WII

A download-only title that does away with the idea of being a hero in favour of placing players on the throne and getting others to do the dirty work for them. It's slow-paced but it sort of works, if only as a way of seeing quests from a different point of view. Interestingly, it wasn't planned as an *FF* game at all – *Crystal Chronicles*' engine was apparently used to prototype the game and it eventually picked up the title as well.



FINAL FANTASY XIII 2009

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Or, 'The moment it became cool to hate *Final Fantasy*'. There's a lot wrong with *XIII*, make no mistake about it – the cast is among the weakest in core series history, the pacing is poor and complaints about its linearity are not misplaced. But where many other JRPGs attempt to disguise their linear structure, you have to sort of respect Square's decision to have *XIII* wear it on its sleeve. If anything, it makes the big third act reveal of the huge Gran Pulse area all the more impressive, plus the Paradigm battle system (a strange hybrid of custom job systems and fixed character roles, with line-ups that can be changed on the fly) is certainly more involved then many similar menu-driven efforts. We'd have a far easier job trying to defend it if it didn't end with a Leona Lewis song, though…

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: ECHOES OF TIME 2009





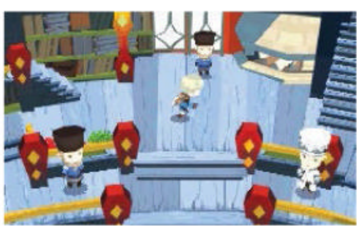
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

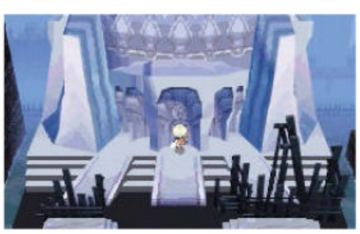
■ It wasn't broken, and it didn't get fixed. *Echoes Of Time* offered more of the same for *Crystal Chronicles* fans, this time allowing cross-platform play locally between the Wii and DS versions. Still not really worth the effort for solo players to pour hours into, but multiplayer proved once again to be an amusing distraction and another great proof of the ways in which the *Final Fantasy* series could break into new realms of gameplay without losing its core values and charm.

FINAL FANTASY: THE 4 HEROES OF LIGHT 2009

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

■ While *XIII* showed a Square desperately trying new things to keep the JRPG afloat, this DS release instead saw the company fall back on what it knows so very well. As traditional a JRPG as you're likely to find in the 21st Century, this is perhaps most notable as the game that spawned the excellent *Bravely Default* as a non-branded follow-up.





FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: MY LIFE AS A DARKLORD 2009

SYSTEM: WII

■ If *My Life As A King* was a stretch for fans with its city management gameplay, this tower defence title is some full-on Plastic Man nonsense. A simple yet effective rock/paper/scissors system determines the effectiveness of each trap or monster on a given unit and the side-on viewpoint and vertical structure are welcome changes to the usual standards, but we're not sure to this day why this even has 'Final Fantasy' in its title.



FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: THE CRYSTAL BEARERS 2009

SYSTEM: WII

■ The nail in the *Crystal Chronicles* coffin, this multiplayer-only action title did away with not only the co-op gameplay that made its forerunners enjoyable but also with the levelling system and character progression you might expect from a decent RPG. If you thought *My Life As A Darklord* completely missed the point of the *Final Fantasy* series, you should check this title out. Only don't, because it isn't very good.



FINAL FANTASY XIV: ONLINE 2010

SYSTEM: PC



■ Another MMO was always on the cards after the insane success of *FFXI*, but the initial launch of *XIV* wasn't the second success story Square likely had in mind. No MMO ever has a particularly good launch but this was poor – console-style menu interfaces, patchy visuals and server issues led many to stick with *XI* instead. Square would need something drastic to fix this mess; its imminent updates did just that.



FINAL FANTASY XIII-2 2011

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Given the backlash to *FFXIII*, you have to wonder what Square was thinking in announcing a direct sequel to arguably the most hated game in the entire series. Still, *XIII-2* made almost too much progress from its linear progenitor – its entirely open-ended structure spanned both space and time to deliver the most confusing map screen and some of the most ludicrous time-hopping quests yet seen in the series. Monster recruiting and training, seeing the same locations in various time periods and the bizarre paradox endings rate among the highs, with characters once again disappointing.

FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 2011

SYSTEM: PSP

■ *Monster Hunter* and its myriad clones cemented the PSP as the hardcore handheld of choice, so this action-leaning title proved to be right at home there. Despite being widely regarded as one of the best-looking PSP games and the best non-mainline *FF* titles in its native territory, the game would not be granted permission to leave Japan. Well, until very recently, anyway…





DISSIDIA 012 FINAL FANTASY 2011

SYSTEM: PSP

■ Both *Dissidia* and the PSP enjoyed wild success in Japan, so this oddly-named sequel (that second word is 'Duodecim', apparently) was to be expected. More playable characters, more stages and more content all presented fans with a reason to upgrade and if you're new to *Dissidia*, you can just jump in right here for the best experience.



THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY 2012

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

■ If you adore the music of the *Final Fantasy* series, then congratulations on having ears that work. Uematsu's compositions and indeed some of his understudies' works are among the most recognisable in all of gaming, making a rhythm action game that uses them an exceptional idea. Dividing tunes into Field, Battle and Event stages, each with different mechanics, *Theatrhythm* was a superb title that has since been rendered basically redundant by *Curtain Call.*

UEMATSU'S COMPOSITIONS AND INDEED SOME OF HIS UNDERSTUDIES' WORKS ARE AMONG THE MOST RECOGNISABLE IN ALL OF GAMING

FINAL FANTASY XIV: A REALM REBORN 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Developers, take note – *this* is how you fix a broken game. Changes across the board from GUI to basic gameplay made this reboot effectively a brand new game, and just in time for its PS3 launch too. Square would go on to refine it further still in time for a PS4 release that enjoys near parity with the PC version, with cross play supported across all three formats. With new content added almost every month, *A Realm Reborn* is destined to evolve yet more as the years roll on. We'd be surprised if this doesn't outgross *XI* in the next couple of years…



LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ If you didn't want one sequel to *Final Fantasy XIII* then it seems unlikely that you'd have wanted *two*. An odd marriage of the Paradigm system from the core game and *X-2*'s Dress Sphere mechanic, this action-heavy twist on the usual combat made switching outfits at the right time the key to victory. With a goal of saving as many people as possible within a restrictive time limit, it's all about making the best possible use of your time and the combat is actually pretty damn tech – just watch some YouTube exhibition mode stuff and try to claim otherwise.

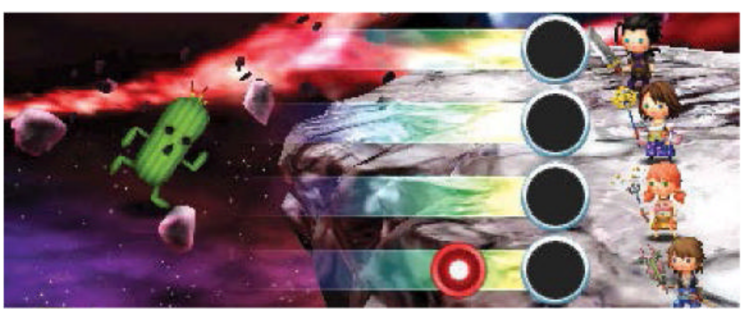




THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY: CURTAIN CALL 2014

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

■ Yet another update, but yet another welcome one. *Curtain Call* brings the total song count to over 200 (with yet more available as DLC, if that's still not enough), adds a host of new characters and refines the Chaos Note system of the original into the much tighter Quest Medley mode. Pretty much essential for fans.







FINAL FANTASY EXPLORERS 2014

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

■ Stop us if you've heard this one before… this is an action-RPG where four players can team up to slay monsters, earn loot, craft better gear and repeat that cycle until they have stumps for hands. Yes, it's a *Monster Hunter* clone, but we're not going to say no to a slice of *FF*-flavoured hunting. Out now in Japan, it's expected to arrive over here some time this year. Maybe. You never can tell with *MH* clones.





FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 HD 2015

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ We've omitted most remakes and reissues on account of how little they changed, but this makes the cut purely due to its interesting circumstances. Despite no localisation of the PSP original (or indeed a Vita upgrade, as was rumoured for a time), a HD version of *Type-0* is coming to PS4 and Xbox One. Cynics may see it as a vessel for the *FFXV* demo and nothing more, but we welcome the chance to enjoy the unreleased game in English.

FINAL FANTASY XV TBC 2016

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Originally announced as *Versus XIII* back in 2006, this incredible looking *FF* title only recently got bumped up to main series standing. It looks deserving of such a promotion, to be fair – redone for current gen consoles (it was initially planned for PS3), it's one of the best showcases we've seen so far for the new hardware. The car, the questionable English dub, and the dudebro vacation theme are all doing their bit to quash excitement, but it wouldn't be a forthcoming *Final Fantasy* game these days if people weren't hating on it. We can't wait.



GAME CHANGERS

GRAN TURISMO

Released: 1998 **Publisher:** Sony **Developer:** Polyphony **System:** PlayStation



Each car in the original *Gran Turismo* has a polygon count of 300, whereas *Gran Turismo 5* utilised a whopping 500,000 polygons for the premium-level vehicles

In an era where arcade racers were king, Sony went down a different route and ushered in the dawn of true simulation racing games

EXITING THE PITLANE late in 1997, nobody could have predicted the impact that Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* was going to have on the racing genre, not just on the then contemporary PSOne but also on Sony's follow-up consoles. A labour of love by Polyphony's visionary, Kazunori Yamauchi, *Gran Turismo* introduced virtual racers to a whole host of features rarely seen on console games before, producing an experience that still lingers long in the memory, thanks to both the original game's success and its pivotal role in creating the formula for later games in the series.

Beaten to the European market by Codemaster's exemplary *TOCA Touring Car Championship*, *Gran Turismo* was up against stiff competition on the starting grid, yet where *TOCA*'s graphics, fully-licenced championship, damage, and handling had wowed us in November 1997, *GT* suddenly changed the boundaries when it was released to European gamers in May 1998.

On first startup, the menu design seemed confusing and mildly uninspiring, yet these underwhelming emotions were quickly washed away when you realised the breadth of automotive exotica on offer to drive. Over 140 cars sat waiting for their turn with you behind the wheel, all officially licensed versions of their real-world counterparts. By today's standards it may sound rather lacking in variety, but before the turn of the millennium, never before had such choice been offered to motorsport enthusiasts.

If that ample selection of chariots wasn't enough though, *Gran Turismo* also introduced us to a range of performance upgrades. Exhausts, engine components, and tyres could all be modified to boost your cars' performance. What's more, aftermarket wheels from a range of real-life brands could be fitted, along with a small selection of Japanese tuner-style rear wings to help customise the look of your fleet, long before the *Need For Speed* franchise offered such extensive in-game services.

OFF FOR A SPIN | GRAN TURISMO SPAWNED ONE OF SONY'S BEST EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISES, WITH SUCCESS FROM THE SCREEN TO THE TRACK OVER THE LAST 17 YEARS.



TOP OF THE POPS

★ Every generation of Sony console has seen two *Gran Turismo* releases, with *GT* through to *GT5* selling a combined 57,500,000 units. *GT3* has been the series' most successful title, with sales of 14,890,000 units on its way to becoming the PS2's second biggest selling game.



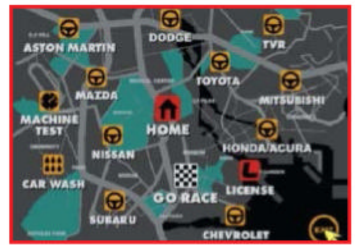
REAL RACING

★ The franchise has transcended the world of virtual racing with its GT Academy programme. Choosing the fastest racers from an online time trial, drivers are then pitted against one another in knockout rounds until a victor is picked. Winners have gone on to race at events like the 24 Hours of Le Mans.



WE'RE WAITING

★ As well as polished racing games, Polyphony Digital is notorious for making us wait to get behind the latest set of new wheels. From *Gran Turismo 2*'s delay of a few weeks due to coding issues, to the infuriating eight-month holdup before *Gran Turismo 5*'s launch, *GT* fans are a patient bunch.



DUDE WHERE'S MY...

★ Porsche? Not to be found in any *GT* games due to EA's recently ended monopoly on the 911 makers. However, the inclusion of German Porsche tuners, RUF, helped to cement the latter into the consciousness of the public. If you want official Stuttgart metal you'll have to head to *Forza* though…

Of course, all this cost money, and starting the game's main Simulation mode with just 10,000 credits meant that your first car was likely to be more suited to a Sunday run to the shops than a flat-out blast around one of the game's 11 fictional race tracks. Inevitably this meant that to find anything mildly impressive, we were sent searching the Used Car Lot. The cars on offer were regularly refreshed after a few races, but to progress, money was the name of the game and to earn it you had to grind.

Early races in *Gran Turismo* brought little reward, but to rise up through the ranks you needed to complete the sometimes infuriatingly difficult and long-winded licence tests. From simple accelerating and stopping tests to full-lap time trials, these challenges often had us screaming at the screen in frustration, such was their penchant for challenging even mildly imprecise driving.

Yet, while the hardcore nature of the career progression turned off some, it was hard not to play *Gran Turismo* just for its sheer beauty. The on-screen displays, such as speed and gear selection, may have seemed, even in the late-Nineties, straight out of an arcade booth, but the cars were pixel perfect at the time. The polygon count of the original may be orders-of-magnitude less than the current offerings, but at the time this was a game with stunning clarity.

■■■ YAMAUCHI AND HIS five-strong team ensured that each car was true to its real-life counterpart. The handling physics were groundbreaking, setting a new benchmark for a whole generation of games. Each vehicle possessed a weight and momentum that other titles had, until that point, failed to match. The effect was the first console game to truly deserve the genre of a driving simulator.

The 11 markedly different circuits all required finesse and real skill to navigate quickly; you couldn't just pick up *Gran Turismo* and drive like a world champion, and it took time to learn your craft. Yes, handling could be fine-tuned in a myriad of ways, but ultimately this was a game about perfecting your driving style.

Perhaps, it was this that led the AI to be slightly disappointing. Each computer-controlled rival was tricky enough to prove a challenge – although difficulty was non-adjustable – but each grid was composed of just five fellow virtual racers. Along with this, the sound of each car could have done with some extra development time, proving that while it was the best of the bunch, *Gran Turismo* still had room for improvement in the coming generations.

Despite this, it's challenging, expansive gameplay provided plenty of hours in front of a screen for racing enthusiasts, topped off with an excellent in-game soundtrack of contemporary pop songs. The age of true simulation was dawning and *Gran Turismo* had already marked its place on top of the podium on its the way to becoming an international phenomenon.

> **THE AGE OF TRUE SIMULATION WAS DAWNING AND GRAN TURISMO HAD ALREADY MARKED ITS PLACE ON TOP**

KEY FACTS

- With 10.85 million units shipped worldwide to date, *Gran Turismo* is the original PlayStation greatest hit. This cemented racing as one of the console's key game genres.
- It is claimed that during the five-year development period of *Gran Turismo*, Yamauchi only went home for four days.
- Yamauchi believed that, despite the depth and breadth of *GT*, the original game only forced the PlayStation to work at 75 per cent of its maximum capacity.
- The game's soundtrack set a precedent for future sequels with a heady mix of Japanese lounge music and contemporary pop songs.

GAME CHANGERS

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DRIVING SIMULATOR

GRAN TURISMO WAS BY NO MEANS THE FIRST CAR SIMULATOR, BUT IT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL GAMES OF THE GENRE, WITH MANY OTHER CONTENDERS LOOKING TO GT FOR INSPIRATION



TOCA TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP 2

■ CODEMASTER'S FIRST *TOCA* release since *Gran Turismo* saw the number of cars available was noticeably expanded, and a few fictional circuits joined the excellent real-world examples. The focus was still on racing rather than purely driving, but the game was all the better for it. The AI was excellent, while the damage simulation was top notch. Handling wasn't up to *Gran Turismo*'s level, but this is one of the greatest racing titles ever.



FORZA MOTORSPORT

■ AFTER RELEASING THE Xbox to rival PS2, Microsoft needed a killer driving game. Coming after two *GT* launches, Turn 10 Studios had some ground to make up, but its opening effort was admirable, already showing hints of what was to come. Sound was a step above the achievements of Polyphony, while the inclusion of mild damage simulation made some fans of the genre overlook the slightly less realistic handling physics.



BURNOUT

■ CRITERION GAMES' OVER-the-top crashfest for PS2, Xbox, and GameCube grabbed people's imagination and made quite a few fall in love with driving games again. *Burnout* was about as far from a driving simulation game as you could get without discarding the driving element altogether, but, in an age of ever-improving realism, it showed that simulation wasn't the only path you had to take to get your automotive fix.



GRAN TURISMO 4

■ FEATURING OVER 700 cars from 80 car manufacturers, *GT4* was possibly the zenith for the franchise. It's stunning graphics showed what the PS2 was capable of, while the breadth and depth of the game kept racers' hands busy for literally days. The introduction of the Nürburgring Nordschleife and the Circuit de la Sarthe were excellent real-world additions, ensuring that *GT4* would go down as one of the greatest simulators of all time.



RFACTOR

■ EVER SINCE GEOFF Crammond's series of *Grand Prix* titles, PC has been the medium 'true simulation enthusiasts' gravitate to, thanks to its greater graphical clarity and processing speed. *rFactor* popularised this conception mainly because it still is a really great example of the genre, due to its *GT*-rivaling dynamics and the huge choice of community-developed car packs.



FORZA MOTORSPORT 4

RELEASED IN 2011, *Forza 4* marked the moment where Xbox's *GT* rival finally made the overtaking move after years of flashing its headlights. The gameplay was more enjoyable, and while there were fewer cars on the disc, each was re-created beautifully. Car sounds in *Forza 4* were incredible, while the constant stream of new car and circuit packs meant the game was constantly evolving.



IRACING

■ THIS SUBSCRIPTION-BASED racing simulator is the current benchmark for the genre. PC-only, the large monthly payments ensure that a host of real-world tracks are constantly being laser-scanned, producing mind-blowingly accurate environments. Handling physics were taken above and beyond what the *Gran Turismo* series had ever achieved and the graded online racing ensures that races are always challenging.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT 2

■ THE *NEED FOR Speed* franchise's general focus on the modifying scene and street racing had never given it the realism or handling dynamics to truly take the fight to Polyphony. That was until the *SHIFT* sub-brand was unveiled. *Shift* came close as a legitimate rival to *GT5* on PS3, but it wasn't until *Shift 2* that EA could truly lay claim to *GT*'s title. Car sounds were beautiful and the range of cars was excellent.



GRAN TURISMO 6

■ NOT RELEASED OUT the blue, but certainly without as much hype as previous games from Yamauchi's studio, *Gran Turismo 6* saw one last Polyphony release for the PS3. Graphics were polished, though the premium/standard car divide still remained. The handling gave much better feedback whether using a wheel or a pad, while the menu was improved, making this the best *GT* game yet, but ultimately too similar to previous releases.



PROJECT CARS

■ FORGET *DRIVECLUB*, *PROJECT CARS* looks like it is going to be the must-have driving simulator on next-gen consoles. Making use of the PS4 and Xbox One's PC-like architecture, the current in-game screens are easily mistakable for real-life. It looks like there will be plenty of exotic real-life metal to test on a host of accurately modelled tracks. This could be a seminal moment where console simulation finally becomes a true rival to the PC.

BEST BOSS

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS SNES [SQUARE] 1996

■ Let's address the glaring inaccuracy first: Bundt isn't even a Bundt cake. While we're at it, he also appears to be alive, has a face and can fire a series of razor-like snowflakes. But more importantly, Bundt personifies the tone of Square's brief dalliance in the *Mario* canon: an idiosyncratic creation rich in humour that bridges the Nintendo's licensed characters with Square's design sensibilities. The boss battle itself is rather elementary. You fight against a pair of French chef stereotypes who slowly begin to realise that the cake they're protecting is moving, running away when it springs to life. Then you fight the three-tiered wedding cake until all that's left is its base sponge. While it's not the most challenging or technical encounter, the unusual, charismatic nature of the boss battle and Bundt's unique design make it one of the most memorable in the history of *Mario* adversaries.







RETRO

INTERVIEW

JASON & CHRIS KINGSLEY

There are many famous gaming siblings, but Jason and Chris Kingsley are two of the most successful. Still running Rebellion 22 years on, we look back at their finest moments

Although they had their roots in the Eighties, the Nineties were far kinder to Jason and Chris Kingsley. Years of freelancing made for a precarious early career but, in deciding to found Rebellion in 1992, the pair have achieved much stability and prosperity since. With *Alien Vs Predator* catching the eye of gamers following its release on the Atari Jaguar and having bagged franchises as varied as *The Simpsons*, *Asterix* and *Star Wars*, Rebellion has gained a reputation as a strong developer-for-hire. But, with the creation of *Sniper Elite*, which launched in 2005, it has also been shown to see the value in its own IP, with this game in particular becoming a popular, well-received franchise. Not that they are likely to rest on their laurels. The brothers have snapped up many smaller developers and they have grown their company into one of the UK's largest…

What got you interested in computing and gaming?

Jason: I've always been interested in games and making up rules in games for others to play. My first memory of gaming is with traditional board games and making variants of them like Nuclear Monopoly. Writing adventure game books came next along with Tunnels and Trolls, a paper-based role-playing game.

Chris: I was always into programming and I built my first computer myself from a kit – it had a whopping 16 bytes of memory and for graphics it had a two-digit hexadecimal display.

Which platforms were of most importance to you when you were younger?

Chris: At home we had an Atari VCS and played a lot of multiplayer games like *Combat* and *Air-Sea Battle*, as well as *Adventure*. We probably played *Space Invaders* the most on the VCS though. After that we got a 16k Commodore PET, and I learned 6502 machine code as I found that BASIC was too slow for arcade-style games – it was all hand-coded though and relative branches had to be worked out on paper. Next came a 48k Atari 800 and *Star Raiders* was a clear favourite. But we both spent a lot of time coding in BASIC, and I coded in machine code and learnt about how the graphics system worked and how to make action games using Player-Missile Graphics – Atari's terminology for sprites. Then there was an Atari ST and this had a fantastic monochrome screen – sharp and high resolution and was much better for long programming sessions.

AS A CONSOLE THE ATARI JAGUAR WAS VERY POWERFUL, BUT COMPLICATED AND TRICKY TO PROGRAM

What prompted you both to create Rebellion in 1992?

Jason: We wanted to make our own games and be able to at least in part influence their direction.

Your first release was *Eye Of The Storm* in 1993 for the Amiga and DOS…

Jason: It was. The team on *Eye Of The Storm* consisted of three people: two





DEVELOPER COMMENTS

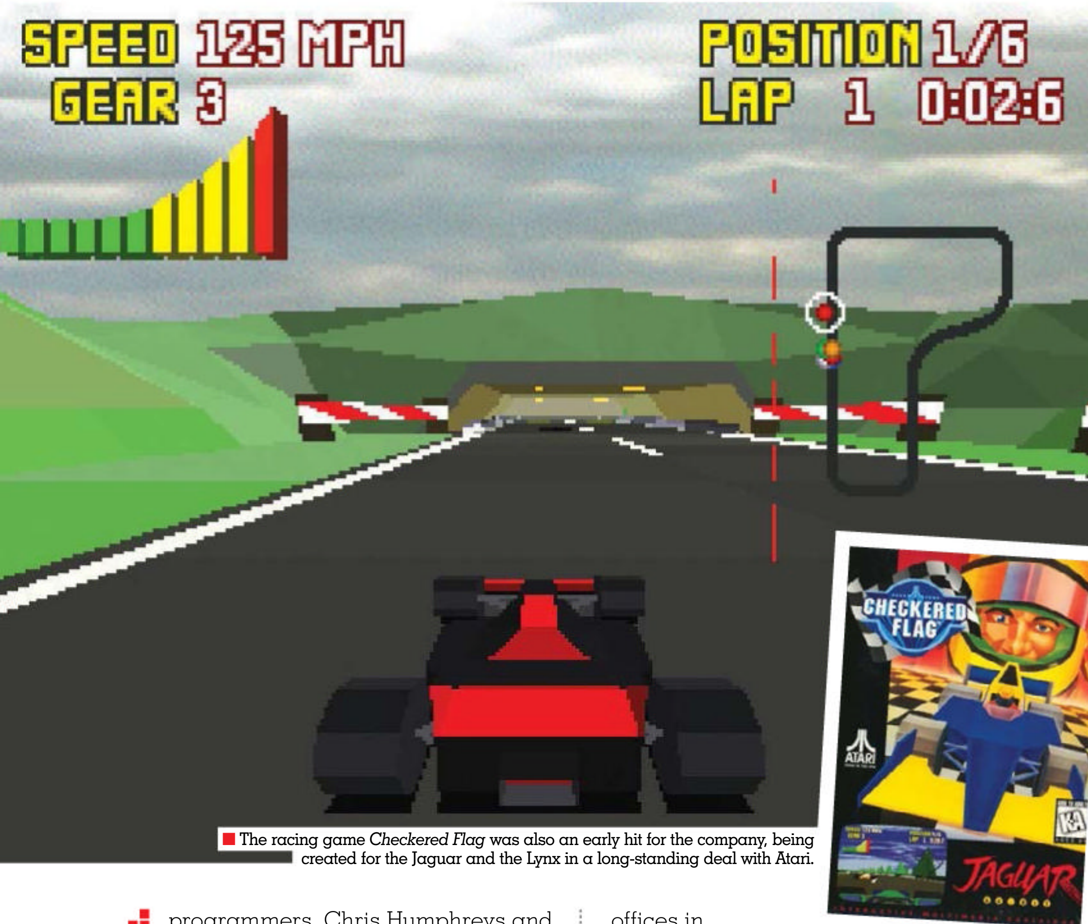


■■■ JASON AND CHRIS are great examples of a pair of talented, creative and very ambitious brothers who set up a UK games company in the late Eighties after graduating from Oxford University. Through their passion, creativity and leadership they were able to grow Rebellion into one of the leading UK game development studios. It's not always been easy, but they are clever guys and have found ingenious ways of navigating the trials and tribulations of an ever-changing industry.

We met them in the late Nineties and became best friends as we realised we shared so many experiences and faced the same challenges. One of our first joint projects, with some other developers too, was to set up the trade industry body TIGA.

When Blitz hit hard times, we turned to them for their support and they were incredibly understanding and helpful for which we and a large number of the Blitz staff are indebted to them.

PHILIP AND ANDREW OLIVER – AKA THE OLIVER TWINS



■ The racing game *Checkered Flag* was also an early hit for the company, being created for the Jaguar and the Lynx in a long-standing deal with Atari.

programmers, Chris Humphreys and Al Perrott, and one artist-designer-producer – me. I designed the whole game and created all the 3D graphics myself. The only 3D tools I had at the start were graph paper and a text editor and of course the maximum number of polygons for each object was in the low 10s, so it was a big challenge but it was a great discipline. The one tool I did have was Deluxe Paint which I used for the 2D art and the texture map. To my knowledge *Eye Of The Storm* was the first 3D game on PC with texture mapping and curves in it.

Checkered Flag and _Alien Vs Predator_ came next for the Jaguar. How did you get involved with Atari?

Jason: When Atari announced its new Falcon home computer – basically a more powerful ST – Chris and I went to Atari's offices in Slough to meet with Alastair Bodin and showed him a new demo for a 3D dragon flight game we were working on. Alastair had the biggest office I've ever seen, and he thought the demo was so good that he got Bob Gleadow, the CEO of Atari Europe, to come straight down to see it. Bob then said: "That would be great for our new Jaguar console!" To which Alastair replied: "What new console?" It was the first that Alastair had heard of the Jaguar too. We were quickly invited to visit the Flare guys in Cambridge and got hold of a machine to play with – the Jaguar was designed in the UK so that made it a bit easier for us to get started. We eventually got a two-game contract with Atari for *Alien Vs Predator* and *Checkered Flag*. That was the catalyst for us to move out of our basement office into a proper office, set up Rebellion and to hire some staff to work for us – we couldn't fit enough people in our basement.



■ Jason and Chris Kingsley receive an award from games trade body TIGA in 2005.

Why did it take four years before your next release, _Klustar_?

Jason: We were working on some other games for Atari on the Jaguar – *Skyhammer* and *Legions Of The Undead* – but they were eventually cancelled by Atari, though *Skyhammer* did see the light of day in the end. We also worked on a mad-as-a-brush PC game called *Mr Tank*. Oh, and there were some other titles beside, and then of course we were very busy on *Aliens Vs Predator* with Fox.

1999 was a busy year – were you rapidly growing at this stage?

Jason: Sometimes game development is like buses – no matter how hard you plan to have a sensible overlap of games with a decent gap between launches they often seem to concertina up and come out around the same time. That was the case with 1999 – it was, perhaps, a defining year for us. We were growing, and learning, and we both had to spend less time making games and more time on making the business work. Our growth at that time was entirely organic and based on our ability to pitch games to publishers; having titles of the quality of *AvP* helped a lot, of course. We were very much in the work-for-hire mindset which, at the time, was great for cashflow but didn't provide much upside.

One of the things we were seeing were a lot of licenses. How did you attract them?

Chris: We had always been big fans of the Game Boy and had worked on various iterations of the hardware over the years. I had put together my own hardware and software tools for the Game Boy from off-the-shelf tools: Dataman's S3 and S4 EPROM programmers and Crash Barrier's METAi assembler development system. Infogrames asked us to work on *Asterix* after we did *Mission: Impossible* on the Game Boy Color for them – that was really fun because we also created some special spy-tools in the game: a message transmitter, a calculator, an address book and an infrared TV remote controller. I think we were the only game to ever use the infrared port on the Game Boy Color. *Tiger Woods* was part of a multi-project work-for-hire deal with Destination Software.

The Noughties was a busy decade too: Rebellion set about snapping up many gaming developers such as Core Design, Strangelite and Awesome Developments...



■ Licences have been a big part of Rebellion's life: it snapped up *2000 AD*, making Dredd its own in a series of games.

Jason: Publishers were resistant to outsourcing so to be successful you had to be big and the only way to do this was to acquire other developers. To a large extent our acquisitions were opportunistic, as some publishers were looking to close them and we didn't want to see them close.

Did it lead to any tension – did any group feel a little put out by the takeovers?
Jason: Most of the takeovers went well but in some cases things just didn't work out. I'd say that for some people a takeover by Rebellion was seen as a good thing but for a few others it wasn't seen in the same light. There's always some level of tension, and in fact that's healthy for development, because you need a range of differing opinions to cover all angles. Ultimately, as a work-for-hire developer, it comes down to the relationships between your development teams and your publishers – it is the publishers that call the shots.

But you were also buying IP. Rebellion owned a fair few publishing companies, acquiring the rights to *2000 AD* in 2000, giving it the rights to *Judge Dredd, Halo Jones* and *Strontium Dog*...
Jason: We've always believed in the importance of IP even during the times we were a work-for-hire developer. Buying *2000 AD* got us a lot of notice as more than just a developer and I guess you could say it propelled us into the elite super-developer category – I think it really surprised a lot of people in the games industry. *MCV* said it was 'undoubtedly one of the boldest and most imaginative moves made by anyone in the games business in living memory.' I couldn't have put it better myself!

Did it help you make better games?
Jason: It allowed us to quickly create and test new IPs, learn about alternative ways to tell stories, and develop worlds with detail and depth.

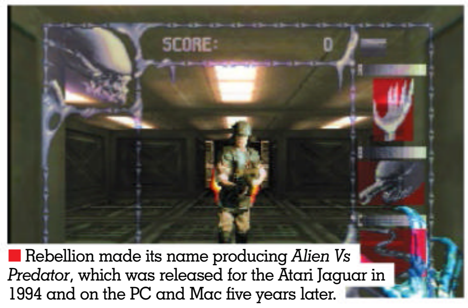
Were you big *2000 AD* fans anyway?
Jason: Yes! We have both been reading *2000 AD* from the day it was launched in 1977. We still remember the Biotronic stickers and the space spinner…

What was your main direction in the Noughties?
Jason: It was a time of significant growth for us, and the industry as a whole. Game budgets were going up but so were the expectations of the players. We were focused on the work-for-hire model and we worked on a lot of licensed titles, but we still managed to create some of our own new IPs like *Sniper Elite*.

I HAVE TO REPEATEDLY EXPLAIN TO MY US COLLEAGUES THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE TO CALL ME SIR

***Sniper Elite* is big for you right now. Where did the idea come from and were you at all surprised by the success?**
Jason: We're very grateful for the success of the *Sniper Elite* series. The idea has grown from the earliest ideas that were thrown around by the team and others. As we owned the brand, it has meant that we're able to make a new game with similar themes and to build on what we made in earlier versions. *Sniper Elite* is not only big for us as a development studio, but it is becoming a pretty big contemporary games franchise across the world.

How does *Sniper Elite III* compare with the other versions?
Chris: It has a higher number at the end! Seriously it's building and expanding on the positives and addressing negatives of feedback we've received. We've worked hard on the openness of the gameplay and the AI in particular but pretty much everything is bigger and better then before.



Rebellion made its name producing *Alien Vs Predator*, which was released for the Atari Jaguar in 1994 and on the PC and Mac five years later.

Have you found yourself becoming removed from the company in any way?
Jason: As the company grew even larger, our roles did change over time, and we constantly had to learn new things. In fact, we are still learning to this day. But that's the nature of the games industry; it is dynamic and fluid, constantly changing and innovating, never standing still.

In 2012, you were awarded an OBE – how did it feel?
Jason: Very pleased indeed and slightly nervous about the ceremony. I also have to repeatedly explain to my US colleagues that they do not have to call me Sir, even though I have my own real and well-used suit of armour.

The gaming industry in Britain is so important to you both that Jason is the chairman of TIGA. How did you get into that role?
Jason: Many years ago, we met with a group of other developers, including the lads from Blitz and Kuju, for dinner at E3. As usual at these sorts of things the talk got to publishers and the industry in general and the way that developers were treated. We all agreed that something had to be done to improve our lot and make the games industry a better place for all. What was different this time was that Chris and I decided to actually do something about it! When we got back to the UK we met with various people in the government, I found Fred Hasson and persuaded him to become CEO of this new organisation, and together with the other founding developers we helped get TIGA going.

What do you feel the UK is bringing to gaming?
Jason: What it has always done: creativity, innovation, technology and vision, along with an appreciation of both the mainland European aesthetic and the North American one. We always seem to have constraints of one sort or another on the titles we create and constraints allow for, and often force, creative solutions.

Jason roped in television personality and one-time game journo Charlie Brooker to play a small role in *Sniper Elite III*.




BEHIND THE SCENES

RUNESCAPE

RuneScape is one of the biggest names in MMOs and helped shape the way the genre evolved over the years. games™ looks at how the legacy began



Released: 2001
Format: PC
Publisher: Jagex
Developer: In-house
Key Staff: Andrew Gower, Paul Gower, Mark Ogilvie



CONSIDERING THE HISTORY of the MMO genre, you'd expect to have seen far more innovation over the years. It's a fairly stagnant genre, but there's always been one game – spanning a huge player base, even to this day – that remained constant in its own core design tenets. *RuneScape*, in fact, set a precedent for a lot of what would become staples of the genre, namely an emphasis on accessibility to open up as wide a group of players as possible.

In actuality, *RuneScape* began long before the term 'MMO' was even conceived, back when 'MUD' was the go-to definition. Multi-User Dungeons had been around since as early as the late Eighties and continued in various forms of popularity into the late Nineties where – with technology pacing forward – it became increasingly apparent that the future was in graphical MUDs. It was inevitable, and at the beginning of the millennium it became a race to dominate this otherwise fairly limited market. The technical issues involved were vast, but whoever managed to crack it had almost guaranteed success.

"The first requirement for the game was that it needed to be quickly accessible from computers with pretty lightweight hardware and internet speeds," says Mark Ogilvie, design director on *RuneScape*. "The founders were frustrated that at university, they would use different computers in libraries all over campus and have to install their current favourite game from a physical disk. That process would cut into precious gaming time, so they decided to make something themselves based around their early RPG and tabletop experiences, which they could play with other people at the same time. One of the founders loved making systems and engines, the other loved making quests and designing worlds, so it all fell together rather nicely."

This mobile boot file would later become one of *RuneScape*'s key innovations. Though it wasn't the first to the GMUD market, it provided an accessibility that would later entice millions. Preceded by *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest*, the Gower brothers wanted to create their own equivalent, with Andrew handling the systems powering it and Paul designing its world. Most of all Andrew had wanted a game that was at once easy to access and to get into, but offered the same kind of depth and interaction that came from popular tabletop RPGs. But there were unexpected positive side-effects to Andrew's streamlined design – despite being graphics-focused, *RuneScape* managed to remain svelte enough that changes could be made quickly and efficiently.

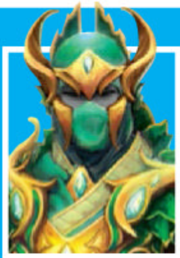
This was a small operation, however, and Jagex was still being run out of the Gower's parents' home in Nottingham while they studied at university, and so the early days required everyone to pitch in. "Everybody turned their hand to art," explains Ogilvie. "They got a few sketches from a friend for some ideas of what a goblin or a dragon might look like; the whole family got involved – [the Gower brothers'] mum created bears, their little brother made a bat… all sorts. Only much later did they even consider actually hiring people to create assets! In the beginning it was still very much a bedroom project for fun and for them, not for an audience with expectations on quality."

RUNESCAPE WAS NOT set out to become a success, but instead a means for the Gower brothers to make the games they wanted to play and little else, a facet that still remains true at Jagex to this day. Ogilvie even adds that the original sketches created for the early incarnation of *RuneScape* are the very same ones that "act as a foundation for every dragon, goblin or bear rework we consider". It's a humbling story for such an important MMO, and it all began with that focus on speed to make better use of limited time at library computers.

RuneScape originally released in beta form in January 2001 and, later that year, Jagex would be formed. Within that year *RuneScape*'s popularity began to rise, particularly among students and schoolchildren who,



RuneScape's medieval setting was accessible enough to draw in a large audience of gamers, but has since expanded to include many themes.



A TIMELINE OF RUNESCAPE

The journey of one of the first MMOs to find mainstream and widespread success

JANUARY 2001
RuneScape is released from development and into beta phase, acting as a soft launch for the new graphical MUD.

SEPTEMBER 2002
More than a year after the launch of the beta, Tutorial Island is added to the game, giving newcomers a place to learn the mechanics in a relatively safe environment.

OCTOBER 2002
After a string of new quests, a new update tweaked gameplay, added in a new town and spells, and improved monster AI.

2001 2002 2002

JANUARY 2003
A brand new mini-game is added, 'gnomeball'. This is a variant of American football, but with a focus on melee combat too.

AUGUST 2003
RuneScape's 50th quest update is added to the game, celebrated by being the longest new quest yet.

DECEMBER 2003
RuneScape 2 enters beta, with new *RS2* servers being added to those willing to test the newest version of the game.

2003 2003 2003

MARCH 2004
RuneScape 2 is officially launched, with players being given the option to switch their account to the new game.

JUNE 2004
In-game player moderators are added, allowing respected members of the community to ensure the game is played fairly by all.

JULY 2005
Farming is added to the game to allow players to grow their own goods, and assist in their crafting professions.

2004 2004 2005

MAY 2006
Player-owned houses are added to the game, giving everyone who can afford it a place to call home.

MAY 2007
In-game Achievements are added to the game, initially restricted to a particular zone and later expanded upon.

NOVEMBER 2007
The Grand Exchange is added to the game, giving players a place to buy and sell their most valuable items.

2007 2007 2006

OCTOBER 2008
PvP worlds are added to *RuneScape*, special servers that have PvP enabled – and if you die you'll lose all your items.

JULY 2011
Clan Citadels are added to the game, the oft-requested feature allowing clans to meet up in a location they can call their own.

FEBRUARY 2013
Old School RuneScape is live, with players taking to it in their thousands to relive the nostalgia.

2008 2011 2013

bereft of their own computers, needed a game that was quick to install yet compelling to play over multiple sessions. By making a game that appealed to themselves and their own needs, the Gower brothers had indirectly made something that would, as a result, draw in thousands more like them. It was the engine that powered it all that was *RuneScape*'s secret to success.

"It was homemade," says Ogilvie of *RuneScape*'s engine. "If we needed to change things, we could. All of our systems were bespoke and if we needed more, we just made more! Because the game client was so thin, any additions we did make could be done very quickly and with an almost unnoticeable effect to the download. Our server downtime would be minutes, at most, every week." This was another boon that appealed to the masses: there were no long, drawn out server maintenance and any problems that were discovered could be quickly resolved. It helped build a fanbase that became reliant on this consistency, and – as a result – the fanbase grew.

The demand for new content continued to grow, but *RuneScape*'s streamlined engine meant this wasn't such a grand undertaking like so many early MMOs. "We have always been about creating new content," claims Ogilvie of *RuneScape*'s approach to gameplay. "Our big selling point aside from the accessibility was (and still is) the rate of content updates to the game. We always looked forward to the new rather than reflecting on the old, which eventually caused us a few problems, having to dedicate lots of time on reworking older content." The type of content that was added was vast, too, not just a handful of new quests. Items, skill updates and many more were developed quickly and implemented even quicker to sustain the increasing demand from fans. "The rate of updates was full on, and the appetite from the players was immense, as they were expecting new content every single week." To Jagex's credit, that was a demand it more than aimed to meet.



The steady stream of updates meant there was always something new.



New professions, skills and areas are opened up all the time.



Though new art is created all the time, the original design sketches for the various beasts of *RuneScape* are still used as reference for this day.

WHAT THEY SAID...



Unlike most MMORPGs, Runescape doesn't give the illusion of listening to the players – Jagex actually does take user opinions into account

MMORPG.com

Because of this demand *RuneScape* became a varied game. Jagex was free to explore different ideas with each new update to see what would stick and what would fail. This led to a very freeform approach to development – at least in the early days – with design documents that were more "brief concepts" than traditional planning. For the early days of *RuneScape* and Jagex, it was more about working dynamically and fluidly to produce the content needed to satiate fans. It helped keep *RuneScape* fresh, but moreover it kept the problems to a minimum. "The limitations were pretty light too," explains Ogilvie, "creating the rich tapestry of themes and ideas that we see now." *RuneScape* has since touched on a wide range of design directions and themes, expanding on the medieval fantasy setting that remains core to the game even now.

RUNESCAPE ENJOYED A year of phenomenal success and with the player count rising, newly formed Jagex needed to look for funds. Initially it had been done so through in-game advertising, paid-for banners that helped pay for the servers to keep *RuneScape*. It soon became increasingly apparent that everyone involved was going to need to work on the game full-time to ensure the stream of content could be created. But advertising on the internet was becoming scarcer by the day; the online craze was waning and soon Jagex was not getting enough from advertising. In February of 2002, the model was changed, and *RuneScape* implemented a monthly fee: "the dotcom bubble burst and advertising revenue reduced considerably," says Ogilvie, "so the only alternative to closing the game was coming up with a subscription service with 'premium' content."

Though there were concerns that it would be widely despised, the team at Jagex knew that without the extra income it could provide the game could not continue otherwise. "Any risks were far smaller than the possible threat of the game closing completely. Nobody was sure how popular it would be, but over the first week there were enough subscribers to cover the costs, and to actually hire a full-time member of staff."

The march of content continued unabated and with it the numbers of subscribers. The addition of the monthly fee was a success, with fans turning up to enjoy the new locations, quests and items on a regular basis. If *RuneScape* has proven anything to the MMO world it's that if you can sustain your players with new content, then they'll continue to play, to subscribe and to stick around for more in the future. It's a hard challenge to face, and one that Jagex managed to handle ably with *RuneScape*. It didn't need to change anything or release huge expansion packs to draw in the crowds; it simply had to maintain the ones that were already playing. "Whilst I don't think we ever played it safe," Ogilvie tells us, "most of our updates focused around adding new content, rather than changing anything existing. Some of our largest increases in community size over the years have followed significant additions to the game. When we have made changes to existing content, small or large, it has the potential to cause friction with the community."

OVER THE FIRST WEEK THERE WERE ENOUGH SUBSCRIBERS TO HIRE A FULL-TIME MEMBER OF STAFF

In later years it's this very approach that has seen many other MMOs fail. Even *World Of Warcraft* fails to appease its most regular and veteran players courtesy of the vast shifts in design that occurs with each expansion pack. *RuneScape* did not – and does not – need to change anything, simply provide *more*. Which made approaching *RuneScape 2* all the more daunting. In 2003, Jagex was considering an upgrade to the *RuneScape* engine; its early graphics were the game's weakest elements, and many knew it. Jagex intended to create a sequel – but rather than



RuneScape has gone through several iterations and updates, being one of the few long-running games to keep up with its audience.

WHAT THEY SAID...



Despite the presence of some history and a fairly thorough mythology, the world is pretty damn generic and somewhat 'dorky' in its approach to the fantasy genre

jeuxvideo.com

cast aside all the work already done, it was decided this new version would be designed to simply replace the one that was already there. In essence is was a swap for improved visuals. It was a risk; the fans might not want to upgrade, or see this as an unnecessary change of direction: "We didn't want to split our community, but equally we didn't want to force migration over to *RuneScape 2*. The main challenge was getting players to understand that it was still the same game, it just looked and played a lot better, and gave us greater scope for content in the future."

The solution to the problem was elegant; provide players the opportunity to move everything over, and if there were those who didn't want to they could stay right where they were. "We had a grace period that allowed player to move their 'bank' from *Classic* to *RuneScape 2*," says Ogilvie, "but eventually they had to choose where it would stay. Getting players to decide which version they wanted to play was difficult – the promise of a better future versus the comfort of what they knew. It's the same challenge with any significant engine development or rework to a system. In addition, we didn't want to slow down our update rate too much, so it was a busy time for us."

On its release, *RuneScape 2* was named simply *RuneScape*, while its older version became *RuneScape Classic*. The uptake in this grace period was impressive, and hardly a surprise – the game was now better looking than ever, and it was futureproofed for fans. "We made it clear that new content would only be added to *RuneScape 2*," adds Ogilvie. "I found it fascinating to learn about features the players had grown to love and rely on versus those things in game we knew were – to us – badly designed and in need of improvement." The development of the two was symbiotic, with any new content also going into the new *RuneScape*. With its success and the large number of players moving to the upgraded version, all future content endeavours were moved onto the enhanced version of *RuneScape*, with "staff only maintaining and bug fixing *Classic*".

The new engine rolled out in March 2004, with only a month later Blizzard's own MMO *World Of Warcraft* being released. Though the viewpoints and art design differed, the visuals were comparable and it was clear *WoW* was going to shake the foundation of the MMO world. But *RuneScape* remained stoic in the face of Blizzard's behemoth. Its approach – to focus on accessibility over everything else – meant its fanbase had no interest in departing. Were there any concerned at Jagex about *WoW*'s release? "Surprisingly not," says Ogilvie. "Update frequency and accessibility were still our trump cards and actually our audience weren't that interested in *WoW*. I think it did affect the rate of new customers, but frankly we were struggling to hire staff and build new servers fast enough to deal with the rate we did have, which was still tens of thousands of new accounts every single day."

MUCH OF THE CONTENT WAS INSPIRED BY FORUM POSTS

JAGEX HAD FOUND success in the simplest of things; despite having a team of only 50 people it was still producing content faster than any other MMO on the market, and even the might of Blizzard wasn't able to compete. Its fanbase was loyal and *RuneScape*, it was clear, wasn't going anywhere. By this point there were millions of players, and as Jagex set about expanding into France and Germany it was only going to become tougher to maintain such a huge community of players. "Incredibly rewarding, challenging, exhausting and satisfying, all at the same time," explains Ogilvie when asked how the team handled such a large playerbase. "So many people with so many opinions might

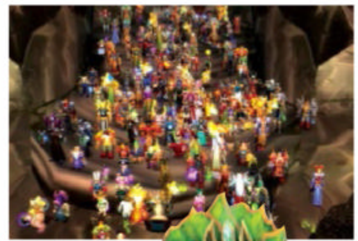
> GAMING EVOLUTION EverQuest > RuneScape > World Of Warcraft



One of the earliest examples of MMOs, *EverQuest* set the foundation for a lot of the core elements we'd come to expect from the genre



Blizzard's success with *WoW* was making it a world players wanted to explore with no boundaries, but making it accessible too



sound daunting, but with each opinion came an idea. So much of the content in the game was inspired by a forum post or an in-game conversation. Football managers often refer to the crowd as their 'twelfth man on the pitch' – our community is no different."

RuneScape is still going strong today, but controversy struck as recently as 2012 when it was announced that the game would be updated to feature microtransactions. It might be every gamer's most despised word – second only to 'season pass DLC', perhaps – but *RuneScape* fans felt particularly embittered by the news. Microtransactions had previously been described by Jagex CEO Mark Gerhard as a 'stealth tax' – so the news that the MMO would soon implement them became a point of contention for the outspoken community. "It was a new – and additional – business model for *RuneScape*, so we naturally had lots of reservations," says Ogilvie. "However, the introduction of microtransactions was a way for us to increase our investment in *RuneScape*'s development, raise its production values, and explore new technology. It certainly wasn't a reaction to the rest of the industry's move towards microtransactions, more a way of ensuring that *RuneScape* would continue to grow and evolve as it always has. It was a big change for us but actually it didn't result in a drop in subscribers. Of course, there were some in the community at the time who were reticent about the introduction of microtransactions, but over time they've seen that they don't fundamentally change the game they've always loved."

From its very inception, *RuneScape* has had a very core ideology running through it; to make it accessible to everyone and to produce content quickly and efficiently. It takes a lot to remain relevant in the MMO genre, but *RuneScape* does even after all these years. More than that, however, Jagex released *Old School RuneScape* in 2013, proving the worth of its original creation even with the announcement of an enhanced, modern equivalent in *RuneScape 3* (released in June 2013). Combined with *RuneScape 3* the player count across the franchise each month rests in the millions, but alone the original *RuneScape* – now known as a separate entity named *Old School RuneScape* – tallies up thousands upon thousands of players, with a daily average of between 10,000-20,000 simultaneous players. The industry's focus on technology often means posterity is rare, but Jagex has proven the worth of maintaining older servers.

Few games – least of all MMOs – can boast an active community more than a decade after its original release, but then this is a testament to the value it has kept on to all these years. But has the release of *Old School RuneScape* and its success informed Jagex of anything? "It's taught us that while as designers we might want to fix everything that appears broken in a game," explains Ogilvie, "people love that game and love its quirks and complexities. If anything, they want more like that, not less. Never underestimate the power of a comfort blanket."



CALL OF THE WILD

■ THE WILDERNESS has had something of a chequered past. This was the collective name for the PvP zones implemented into every *RuneScape* server (outside of the later-added PvP worlds), and was a high-risk location where other players could fight one another. The winner of a PvP bout would be able to claim their opponent's items as reward, which meant it was a very difficult place to visit. As problems with bots and real-world trading began to rise, however, the Wilderness became a headache for Jagex, who didn't want to remove the PvP functionality but understood that its inclusion was giving the problems a place to fester. It's had a lot of development attention over the years, and had even been removed entirely at one point.



■ *RuneScape*'s original graphics were derided, even at the time.

BEST INTRO

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

SONIC TEAM [SEGA]
SEGA GENESIS/MASTER SYSTEM **1991**

ALONG WITH A funky, attention-grabbing soundtrack (something that would go on to be a steady *Sonic* trope), the opening screen of the very first *Sonic The Hedgehog* perfectly summed up what Sega was gunning for with the *Sonic* franchise; Sonic's furrowed brow, cheeky smirk and gentle finger wag showed attitude and captured his personality straight away, while the scrolling background showed the parallax 16-bit graphics in all their tropical splendour – evoking feelings of escaping, holidaying. The clear Sega logo, amongst the stars and stripes (and wings) of the splash screen, was designed to appeal to a distinctly American audience – and if the success of the first four *Sonic* games is anything to go by, it worked.




TM



THE RETRO GUIDE TO…

BLIZZARD

As World Of Warcraft prepares to celebrate its tenth anniversary, games™ decided it was the perfect time to look back at Blizzard's impressive back catalogue

NOWADAYS IT'S HARD to imagine PC gaming without thinking of Blizzard. It's responsible for three of the most important franchises on the platform – *World Of Warcraft*, *Diablo* and *Starcraft* – and has had phenomenal success with its *WoW* spinoff *Hearthstone*.

Once upon a time though, things were very different for the fledgling developer. Originally formed in 1991 by Frank Pearce, Allen Adham and Michael Morhaime, Blizzard was originally known as Silicon & Synapse and started off creating Amiga, PC and Mac ports for a range of games, including *Battle Chess* and *Castles*. That all changed with the release of *RPM Racing*, its first standalone game for the Super Nintendo. Other console releases quickly followed, including *Rock n' Roll Racing*, *The Lost Vikings* and *The Death And Return Of Superman*, but it was the release of the real-time strategy hit *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* that saw the Irvine-based developer turn its focus to the PC market. The move was a shrewd one, with Blizzard Entertainment now being one of the biggest players in the market thanks in no small part to its groundbreaking success with the likes of *Diablo III* and *World Of Warcraft*.

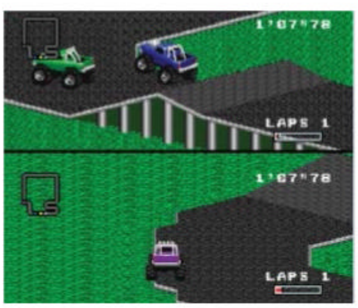
Join us as we celebrate this gaming giant and look at its key releases from the past 23 years. How many have you played?

RPM RACING 1991

SYSTEM: SNES

Competent is the best way to describe Blizzard's first original entry in the world of videogames. It's essentially a remake of Electronic Arts' popular Commodore 64 game *Racing Destruction Set*, and allows you to race around your own courses, or compete in premade ones with a variety of different vehicles. While the racing itself is rather average, it's worth visiting as it's one of the first SNES games to utilise the console's distinctive High Resolution Graphics Mode. While the aesthetics give a good indication of the technical success that would mark many of Blizzard's later games, the uninspired gameplay and tiny playing window made *RPM Racing* needlessly difficult. Oh and that's an acronym for Radical Psycho Machine but you already knew that. Right?





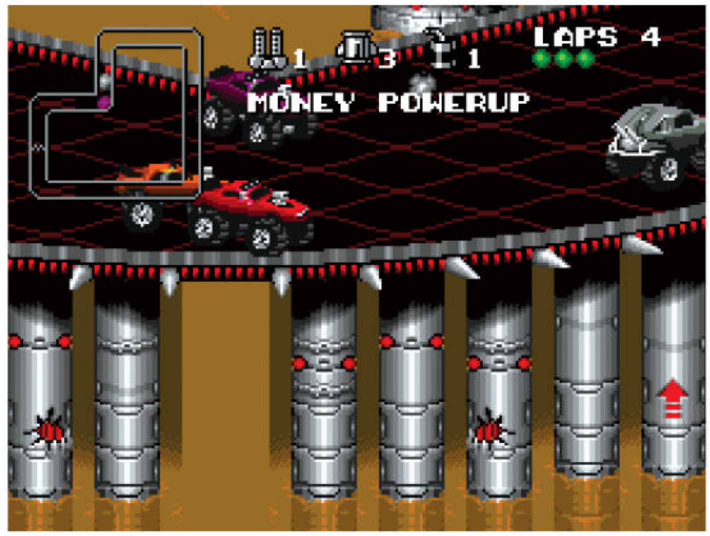
THE LOST VIKINGS 1992

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Now this is more like it. *The Lost Vikings* is clunky and a little awkward to control at times, but also a great example of the imagination and creativity that would form the hallmark of many later Blizzard games. A bizarre mishmash that incorporates puzzling, platforming and strategy, *The Lost Vikings* sees you managing your time between the titular Nords: Erik, Baleog and Olaf. Each has his own unique abilities – Erik runs faster and can jump, Baleog utilises close and long range weapons, while Olaf can use his shield to block enemies and projectiles. The Vikings themselves are full of character, while its success on the SNES saw it moving to numerous other platforms, from the Amiga CD32, to the Game Boy Advance.







ROCK N' ROLL RACING 1993

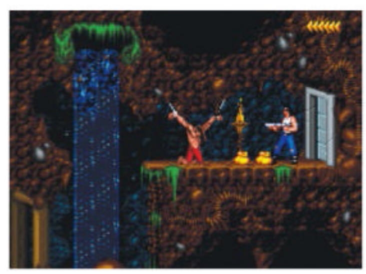
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard learnt quickly from the mistakes of *RPM Racing*, delivering a better sequel that is immense fun to play. Out came the high-res visuals, more weapons were introduced, the plinky-plonky soundtrack was replaced with a selection of heavy rock riffs, while the handling and track design was greatly improved. The end result is an entertaining racer that offers convincing physics, fierce competition and a great sense of progression. It's the superb renditions of rock tunes that many will (rightly) remember *Rock n' Roll Racing* for.

BLACKTHORNE 1994

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Although *The Lost Vikings* hinted at Blizzard's interest in exploring game worlds, it was this effort that proved the developer was able to create interesting game worlds. *Blackthorne* is an epic, brooding adventure that calls to mind the likes of *Flashback* and *Prince Of Persia*. Protagonist Kyle is able in the platform stakes but packs a mean punch thanks to the meaty shotgun he carries. Gameplay is similar to the aforementioned *Flashback*, with shadows of the SNES port of *Alien 3*.







THE DEATH AND RETURN OF SUPERMAN 1994

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES

Well this is an achievement. Against all odds, Blizzard made a Superman game that wasn't terrible. Based on the popular comic strip, *Death And Return* is worth playing because it allows you to control five different characters: Superman, The Cyborg, The Eradicator, Superboy and Steel.

They all feel fairly different to each other, but there's no denying that this is nothing more than a game about hitting things and hitting them hard. Now we're normally fine with this, but the combat of *Death And Return* is fairly run-of-the-mill and the lack of a multiplayer means that anyone other than a Superman fan will soon get bored. Still, being able to fly – albeit for limited periods – is a rather nice touch.





WARCRAFT: ORCS & HUMANS 1994

SYSTEM: DOS, MAC

Warcraft certainly wasn't the first RTS game, but it was one of the first to really realise the possibilities of the still fledgling genre and help take it in new and exciting directions. The most notable difference to its peers is the distinctive fantasy setting. The sci-fi elements found in the likes of *Command & Conquer* and *Dune 2* are entirely missing, instead focusing on an age-old battle between humans and orcs. It features similar resource management to its peers; the ability to group together small parties and has a surprisingly slick interface for its age. There's no denying that it feels rather clunky to play now, but the ability to host matches between Mac and DOS players, compete in different scenarios and use spawn installations felt incredibly fresh at the time. This was a genuinely excellent strategy game and in fact was the title that's largely responsible for making Blizzard the success it is today.

JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE 1995

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES

There's a reason everyone forgot Blizzard's *Street Fighter II*-inspired one-on-one fighter. It's rubbish. Okay, rubbish might be a little harsh, but there's no denying this is a very forgettable brawler with few redeeming features. The sprites look decent but hitting your opponent rarely feels satisfying, while the difficulty is all over the shop. Kudos to Blizzard for making Aquaman as capable as every other hero here, but this is pretty dire stuff. In fact, we were right the first time. It's rubbish.





"WARCRAFT II BOASTS THE SAME BRILLIANT RESOURCE GATHERING AND CONTROLS THAT MADE THE ORIGINAL SO POPULAR TO PLAY"

WARCRAFT II: TIDES OF DARKNESS 1995

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard's sequel to its first strategy hit was another big success eventually shifting over 2 million units. That's a lot of Orc slaying. Like the original game, *Tides Of Darkness* consists of two separate single player campaigns, one for Orcs, the other for humans. It also boasts the same brilliant resource gathering and controls that made the original so popular to play. Simply replicating a past classic isn't enough for Blizzard though, so it introduced an insane amount of extras that further enhanced its fantastic original.

The landlocked gameplay of the original is expanded with the introduction of flying and seafaring craft; new races can be aligned with; it is possible to build a huge number of new structures, while the base resources of gold and lumber have been swollen with the introduction of oil. The Fog Of War mechanic has also been tweaked, making for a far better balanced game. In fact everything about *Tides Of Darkness* screams improvement, from its fantastic cartoony looking visuals to its slick and versatile interface. The console versions have new control systems and include the expansion *Beyond The Dark Portal*.



DIABLO 1996

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

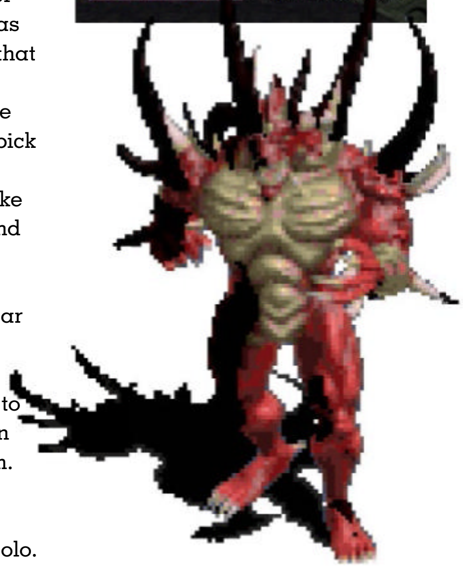
Diablo is another example of a Blizzard game that takes a well worn genre and turns it into something far more exciting.

At its most basic *Diablo* owes fealty to the likes of *Dandy* and *Gauntlet*, early dungeon crawlers that allowed you to descend into the underworld and duff up a seemingly endless supply of monsters, but it feels far more epic. This in part is due to the three fleshed out characters: Warrior, Rogue and Sorcerer that all play differently to each other and in turn offer plenty of replay value once the game has been completed. It's the story that really sets it apart from other games of the time, that and the sheer amount of loot you can pick up as you play.

While *Diablo* has a fresh take on the war between heaven and hell, it also allows you to find a huge selection of insanely powerful items. While you'll fear exploring the deeper sections of Tristram (the village where *Diablo* is set) the sheer power to be found there will spur you on – often to your inevitable doom. It clearly plays best with four players, but *Diablo* still works extremely well when playing solo.











THE LOST VIKINGS 2 1997

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard's sequel is a rather unsatisfying one. It was released five years after the original game and straddles generations (the Saturn, PlayStation and PC versions were handled by Beam Software).
The structure of *The Lost Vikings 2* is the same as the first game: use your Viking's unique skills to traverse the puzzle-like levels. Unfortunately, the addition of two new characters, Fang the wolf and Scorch the dragon, make the game feel a little messier. While you still only ever control three Vikings at a time, the new abilities – Fang can climb walls and Scorch can fly and throw fireballs – don't gel as well together and it feels like Blizzard's game is trying to do too much. It works far better on the 32-bit systems, due to a lack of competition on those platforms at the time, but age has not been kind to it.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE BREVIK

Diablo's co-creator on how it came to be

What inspired *Diablo*?
There were many, many games that influenced *Diablo*'s design, but if I had to narrow it down to a handful, I would say that *Moria* – a Unix-based text game – and *Warcraft* were the biggest.

***Diablo* isn't like many traditional RPGs. Why is that?**
I was never a big fan of elves, unicorns and dragons. I thought that a zombie-infested game with demons was a far more attractive prospect than the Tolkien-esque stuff. We wanted a far grittier atmosphere to the game. I never really set out to make it strictly for a more mature audience, but we made it the way we found most interesting and different.

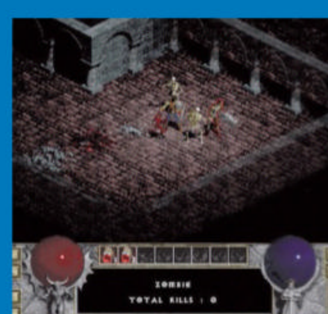
Why create an action RPG?
Because of the mechanics of *Diablo*'s real-time environment, we had to change how the numbers worked for this sort of game. *Diablo* had to be balanced in such a way that it was action packed and involving for players. With pen and paper RPGs, fights can take a very long time, because each round can last ten to fifteen minutes in a normal-sized group. As a result, the numbers are different. You don't want there to be 25 rounds, but you might want that out of a *Diablo* boss monster.

Is it true you wanted to make *Diablo* as accessible as possible?
We joked that *Diablo* needed to pass the 'mom test', so we asked ourselves: is it simple enough that my mom could play it, or will she not understand it? If it was too complicated then we either changed it so that it wasn't, or introduced it over time in a step-by-step fashion so that complex concepts were broken down over time. We made the game extremely easy to use and accessible to a wide range of gamers. This was done to widen the audience and make it more of a mass-market kind of game.

Why did you create random dungeons?
I love random content, because you never know what's going to happen. With planned-out levels, you can balance the game easier and create certain situations you want the player to go through. But once the player goes through that content once, it's far less interesting to go through it again.

Why did you implement the multiplayer mode?
Blizzard's president proposed Battle.net. This was clearly a good idea and we agreed to it even though it meant extra work. We had to go back into the code to retro-fit much of multiplayer into it.








STARCRAFT 1998

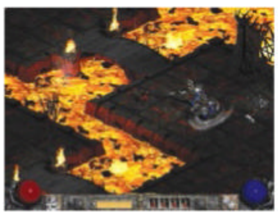
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ The beauty of Blizzard's hit RTS lies in the sheer diversity of its three races: the Protoss, Terrans and Zerg. Unlike many real-time strategy games of the time, each race has its own distinct abilities, making them stand apart from each other and lead to different styles of play. Despite these differences, the game itself is beautifully balanced, ensuring that no one faction has the upper hand. While the single player campaign mode is huge, consisting of 30 stages, it's the finely tuned multiplayer and level editor that helped Blizzard's game build a huge fanbase. The controls are great, with Blizzard taking everything it learned from *Warcraft* and creating a system that's fast and flexible.

DIABLO II 2000

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

■ Everything about Blizzard's sequel was bigger and better than the first. Graphically it was sensational, with dark gloomy locations that contrasted greatly with the limited environments of *Diablo*. The character roster has also been revisited with five new heroes: Amazon, Necromancer, Barbarian, Sorceress and Paladin. As with *Diablo*, each plays completely differently to each other, while their skill trees allow for an impressive amount of customisation.






WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS 2002

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

■ Another smash hit for Blizzard. The most obvious change is that there are two new races, Night Elves and Undead, with their own distinct skill sets. Creeps – hostile AI units that will attack anyone - are also a big addition to the game, adding an additional fear factor and making the mining of gold and other resources particularly dangerous. A day and night cycle has also been included, which changes the gameplay as creeps fall asleep at night, making scouting all the more effective. By far the biggest change is the introduction of heroes, powerful units that level up and unlock a range of useful skills and spells. Add in an expansive world editor and it becomes hard to see how Blizzard could possibly improve its classic in the future. In a similar vein, no new *Warcraft* games have been released since *The Frozen Throne* in 2003.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT 2004

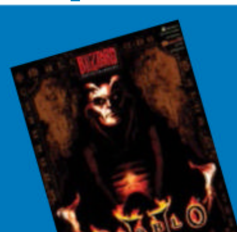
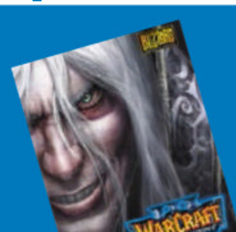
SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

■ We won't focus too much on Blizzard's game changer as it's pretty obvious to all why it's so important, but let's just say it changed MMORPGs forever. One of the most noticeable aspects of *WoW* was that it wasn't massively original. Instead it simply took many of the elements from other similar games and added a level of polish that immediately made it stand out from its peers. Talent trees, quest systems, immersive lore and a near bug free launch all helped Blizzard's game on release, while its general easiness and accessibility ensured it picked up a huge number of new players who typically didn't play MMORPGs.



EXPANDING OUT The many Blizzard expansions




BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL

FROM: WARCRAFT II
YEAR: 1996

■ The first expansion for a *Warcraft* game introduced two new campaigns, new multiplayer maps and 10 new heroes. Oh and it was developed by the defunct Cyberlore Studios.

HELLFIRE

FROM: DIABLO
YEAR: 1997

■ Interestingly, this expansion wasn't by Blizzard, with coding duties falling to Synergistic Software. It introduces a new character, the Monk, as well as two hidden ones (Barbarian and Bard).

BROOD WAR

FROM: STARCRAFT
YEAR: 1998

■ *Starcraft*'s first expansion was a big one. It diminishes the success of rushing tactics, has a bigger focus on strategy and introduces seven new units and augmented AI when playing alone.

LORD OF DESTRUCTION

FROM: DIABLO II
YEAR: 2001

■ This is notable for the addition of its fifth act, two new classes: the Assassin and Druid and a raft of gameplay changes to the core game, including new items and weapons.

FROZEN THRONE

FROM: WARCRAFT III
YEAR: 2003

■ This expansion features four campaigns, new units for each available race and several neutral heroes. It also reintroduced some sea units last seen in *Warcraft II*.

BURNING CRUSADE

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2007

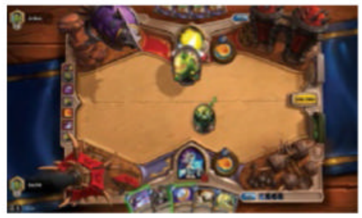
■ Blizzard's first *WoW* expansion sold over 2 million units on release day. It adds the Draenei and Blood Elves, upped the level cap to 70 and includes the Shaman and Paladin classes.




STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY 2010

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

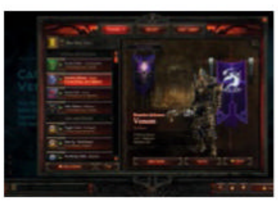
Excitement for Blizzard's sequel was so great that it sold over three million copies in its first month on sale. The excitement was well placed, as *Starcraft II* is arguably one of the best examples of the genre to date. Unlike the original game, the campaign of *Wings Of Liberty* focuses largely on the Terrans and is largely non-linear. It's also packed with variety, constantly challenging what you'd expect from a typical example of the genre and making it fresh and exciting. *Wings Of Liberty* delights in throwing curveballs at you, but also makes you think on your feet thanks to many of the returning units having new skills to master.




HEARTHSTONE: HEROES OF WARCRAFT 2014

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard's latest game has been a resounding success. Like *Magic: The Gathering* it's a collectible card game, but unlike its digital peer, *Hearthstone* is not trying to gouge you at every possible opportunity. Granted you'll have to start spending a bit of dosh if you want to compete in the big leagues, but it's possible to build up respectable decks without spending. Based on the *Warcraft* universe, *Hearthstone* features 10 characters, each with their own unique spells and abilities, from Warriors to Priests. The addition of these heroes works far better than the similar Planeswalkers of *Magic*, while their large number of unlockable cards ensures you'll be dipping in for more. As well as one-on-one duelling, *Hearthstone* also offers a drafting option called The Arena. You draft a deck of 30 cards by selecting from a choice of three each turn, then take on human opponents until you lose three times.

DIABLO III 2012

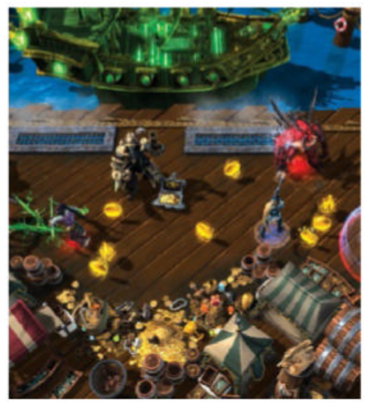
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Despite setting a new record on release for selling 3.5 million units on its first day of sale, things haven't been easy for *Diablo III*. It was beset by internet issues on release due to Blizzard's insistence on it being always online, while its Auction Houses proved so controversial they were eventually shut down earlier this year. Early issues aside, *Diablo III* is quite simply the best game about hitting monsters you're ever likely to play.

HEROES OF THE STORM 2014

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

Still in Beta, Blizzard's first MOBA already looks like it's going to solve one of the genre's biggest problems: accessibility. It eases you in, with easy-to-understand rules and great presentation. It's a free to play game, supported by micropayments, delivering a product full of Blizzard's usual deft touches.





WRATH OF THE LICH KING

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2008

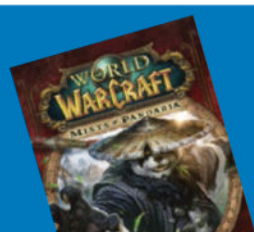
Ooh, your characters can now hit level 80. Other additions include the ability to explore the icy continent of Northrend and a new hero class in the form of the Death Knight.



CATACLYSM

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2010

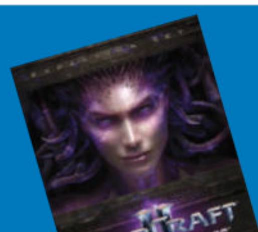
This was the big one as it helped usher in a complete overhaul of *WoW*'s playing systems, from major class changes to a complete overhaul of the talent system. The level cap here hit 85.



MISTS OF PANDARIA

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2012

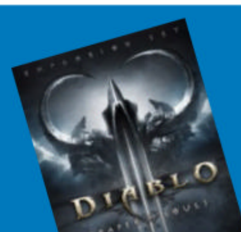
This expansion raises the level cap to 90, introduces a new continent, Pandaria. It also adds Pandaren (a group of anthropomorphic Pandas) and the Monk class.



HEART OF THE SWARM

FROM: STARCRAFT II
YEAR: 2013

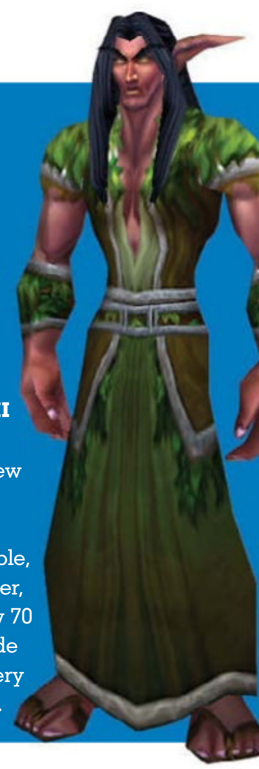
The first expansion for *Starcraft II* focuses on the terrifying and ruthless Zerg faction. It follows directly on from *Wings Of Liberty* and features a number of new units for each of the races.



REAPER OF SOULS

FROM: DIABLO III
YEAR: 2014

There's a lot of new stuff on offer here. A new class, the Crusader is available, there's a fifth chapter, the level cap is now 70 and Adventure Mode lets you explore every region in the game.



GAME CHANGERS

TOMB RAIDER

Released: 25 October 1996 **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive **Developer:** Core Design
System: PlayStation, PC, Sega Saturn



Tomb Raider actually had locations inspired by real history – Vilcabamba (pictured), for example, was the last stronghold of the Incas before the Spanish invaded in 1572.

Released back in 1996, Tomb Raider unleashed Lara Croft on the world – who would become more than just a protagonist, but a legitimate celebrity

CAST YOUR MIND back to 1996 – in the world of gaming, 3D was new. It was unknown ground and a lot of console developers were still testing the waters. Moving away from the pre-rendered backgrounds and the isometric views of the early PSOne games, *Tomb Raider* was arguably the first action-adventure game to do 3D *properly*. The original instalment of *Tomb Raider* hit a laser-focused sweet spot in the blooming Nineties games industry – it presented a good, well-made, innovative game, while simultaneously appealing directly to the teen and young adult market. *Tomb Raider* observed what *Super Mario 64* was doing with 3D platforming, and took the genre to PlayStation's gamers – a move, it would turn out – that would cement *Tomb Raider* and Lara Croft's place in gaming history forever.

Tomb Raider's release came six months after *Super Mario 64*; a game that was, for a lot of people, perfect. It introduced watertight 3D mechanics and presented them in a familiar and accessible way. *Tomb Raider* went the exact opposite direction, appealing to the PlayStation's more hardcore audience. Rather than applying to the cutesy, family-friendly template *Mario* had set out, *Tomb Raider* focused on violence and exploration – taking its cues from the myriad action-adventure films that popularised Hollywood during the early Nineties. *Tomb Raider* was an archaeological fantasy – a benchmark game in the evolution of action platforming and woven deeply into the DNA of the likes of *Uncharted*, the recent *Prince Of Persia* games and even more action-orientated affairs like *InFamous*. Lara moved incredibly well for a character designed in 1996; her acrobatics were expertly designed and everything always felt natural – flipping, jumping, side-stepping, scaling walls: it was all a pleasure to do. Supported by clear visual language – you always knew where to climb, what to grab on to or how far to jump – *Tomb Raider* truly brought platforming into a safe 3D realm.

The structure of the game was simple – explore this, solve this puzzle, fight these enemies. Rinse, repeat. But therein lay the game's success – it didn't overcomplicate things, it didn't push its core mechanics too far. The game introduced you to a few abilities and created puzzles in which every ability was fully explored. *Tomb Raider* had a sense of skill progression that made the player feel smart for manipulating, even though it was mostly scripted

THE ANATOMY OF TOMB RAIDER | WHAT INSPIRED CORE DESIGN TO CREATE LARA IN THE FIRST PLACE?



THE CITY OF DERBY

★ Core Design's offices in the Midlands city of Derby actually played a big part in forming the basis for the design of Croft Manor – one of the most iconic places players come across in any *Tomb Raider* game. The city of Derby honoured Lara's legacy by renaming one of their main roads 'Lara Croft Way'.



INDIANA JONES

★ Surprising exactly no-one, Lara was originally developed to be similar to a female Indy – even her name bore the same roots, starting out as Laura Cruz. As Core Design began fleshing Laura's character out more, they decided she needed to be more English – specifically 'a proper English lady'.



ACCIDENTAL BREASTS

★ Lara's (in)famous bosom was the result of a modelling accident: when playing with Lara's model, designer Toby Gard accidentally moved the bosom measurements up to 150 per cent of the placeholder size. The other designers saw the alteration and encouraged Gard to keep it – the entire six-man team 'loved it'.



INTERNATIONAL MYTHOLOGY

★ By having Lara spelunk her way through caves and tombs around the world, Core had the licence to include all manner of legendary beasts, from Greek to Egyptian. By tapping into more questionable parts of ancient history (re: Atlantis), Core could also handily *invent* mythologies to throw into the mix.

– the illusion of this much control made everyone playing the game feel brilliant for solving this fiendish puzzle or taking out this ridiculous enemy.

Tomb Raider's other strength laid in its ambitious environments – looking back now, the textures and blocky objects seem amateurish, but at the time, the visuals were breaking new ground. From the claustrophobic confines of stone corridors and cave routes to grand, expansive halls forgotten for millennia, each location seemed relevant and logical – the world building in the game was masterful.

THE CONSIDERED ARCHITECTURAL approach to building the game sat alongside smooth animations, impressive loading speeds and movement, advanced lighting and application of colour – all these elements combined to produce a game that was not just pleasant to look at, but was technically sophisticated. Compared to the low resolutions and primary colours of *Mario*, *Tomb Raider* was a visual masterpiece.

The game's treatment of Lara as its protagonist was both groundbreaking and controversial – Lara was the first female action hero the games industry had seen and, while the original itself took care to treat her job as a protagonist seriously, her sexualised appearance and infamous proportions were also clearly marketing tools (albeit ridiculously successful ones). Lara straddled an uncanny middle ground: she was daring, inspirational and ferocious, but she also ran around the jungle in hotpants and a low-cut top. Lara's physical presence caught the attention of Timberland and Lucozade – whether she liked it or not, she was pushing gaming into mainstream media in ways the previous gaming mascots never could. Lara wasn't for children; she was an advert for adult gaming, something the console market hadn't had the luxury of showing off before.

Lara's character was always admirably set up, though; where Eidos could have thrown Lara at you and said 'Look: sexy action lady!' it didn't, for the most part, opting instead to humanise Lara in a realistic and emphatic way. Lara was an upper-class millionaire, living in the lap of luxury and knowing little of struggle. When her plane crashes on her return from a skiing trip, Lara becomes a survivalist – her return to civilisation bores her, so she sets out to globetrot, seeking treasure and excitement.

Chances are, back in 1996, you'd never been plonked in the middle of a jungle and been given the simple 'Survive!' goal before. You and Lara were going through these learning curves at the same time – and that narrative conceit made you associate more with her situation, bringing you into the game more. Lara was a determined lady, out for herself, out for plunder and glory. She was Nathan Drake before Nathan Drake – the Indiana Jones of videogames, both in terms of legacy and iconic status. And that, more than anything, is why Lara remains so strongly rooted in gaming's collective consciousness.

THE GAME'S TREATMENT OF LARA AS ITS PROTAGONIST WAS GROUNDBREAKING AND CONTROVERSIAL

KEY FACTS

- *Tomb Raider* turned the fortunes of Eidos around – the year before the game's release, Eidos suffered a $2.6 million loss. After *Tomb Raider*, profits soared to $14.5 million.
- There was never a cheat code on console games to unlock 'nude Lara' – but there was a patch for PC that applied the naked skin to Lara's model. Eidos sent out a cease and desist to all sites hosting the patch.
- The game was originally developed on Sega Saturn development kits, but *Tomb Raider* would eventually find success on PlayStation, and the first instalment was the only Saturn game in the series.

GAME CHANGERS

THE 10 SPELUNKING LESSONS TOMB RAIDER TAUGHT US

LARA'S SHEER DISREGARD FOR ANY HEALTH AND SAFETY RULES REMAIN INSPIRATIONAL TO THIS DAY. HERE ARE THE 10 BEST LESSONS LARA TAUGHT US ABOUT THE ART OF SURVIVALISM



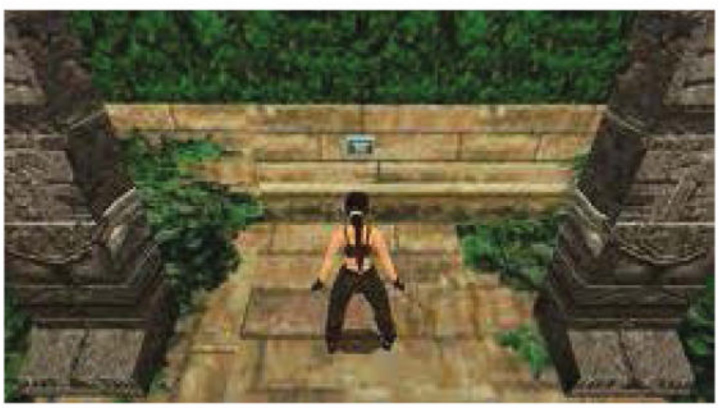
A T-REX IS NO MATCH FOR A HANDGUN (TOMB RAIDER [1996])

LARA TAUGHT US that if you come across an enormous T-Rex in the middle of a clearing in a thick, tropical jungle – don't panic. Merely pull out your handguns, sink a couple of magazines into its flank whiles strafing about, and you'll be just fine. Just make sure you don't get too close – those teeth are sharp.



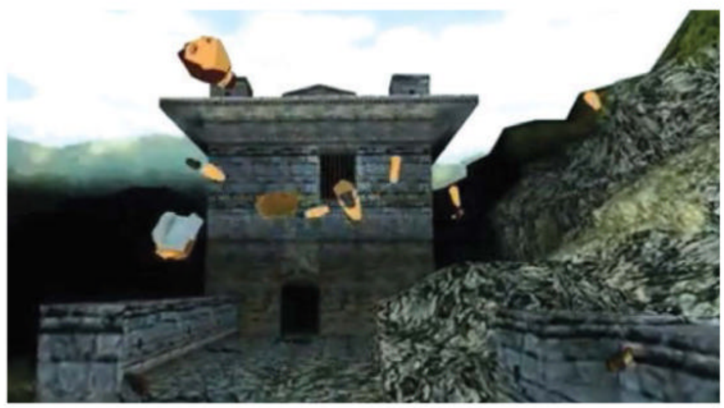
NEEDY BUTLERS CAN BE DEALT WITH (TOMB RAIDER II)

WINSTON – LARA'S LOYAL butler that would follow you around, wherever you went – could be seen as a little needy. If you felt that he needed to 'cool off' a little, you could just lead him to the freezer and lock him in. Sounds cruel, but Winston always turned out okay in the end, right? Right?



GARDEN ASSAULT COURSES ARE THE WAY TO GREATNESS (TOMB RAIDER II)

THE FIRST *TOMB RAIDER* only let you explore the interior of Lara's not-so-humble-abode, but once the sequel came out, you realised the sassy spelunker had a whole training ground in her back yard. That made us think: if we had those resources available to us, we'd be an invincible tomb raider too, surely?



EXPLODING YOURSELF IS BAD (TOMB RAIDER II)

WALK ONE STEP forward, one step back, turn around three times and jump forward. BANG: Lara is exploded into a blocky spatter of body parts and flies around the screen. We tried re-creating this bizarre sequence in real life and it just looked like a weird interpretive dance. Don't try this at home, kids.



SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER TO JUST STAY AT HOME (TOMB RAIDER [2013])

■ AFTER YOUR STUDIES, do you fancy blowing off responsibility and travelling the globe? Maybe you want to find yourself, or visit that country you've loved all your life? 2013's *Tomb Raider* taught us that a gap year isn't always what it's cracked up to be especially if you end up heading to the Dragon's Triangle.



LONDON'S UNDERGROUND IS FULL OF FREAKS (TOMB RAIDER III)

■ A LOT OF DIFFERENT narratives take a guess as to what *really* dwells beneath London's cobbled streets, but *Tomb Raider III* saw a catsuited Lara delve into the depths of our capital to find a group of narcissistic troglodytes that burnt away their flesh in search of eternal youth.



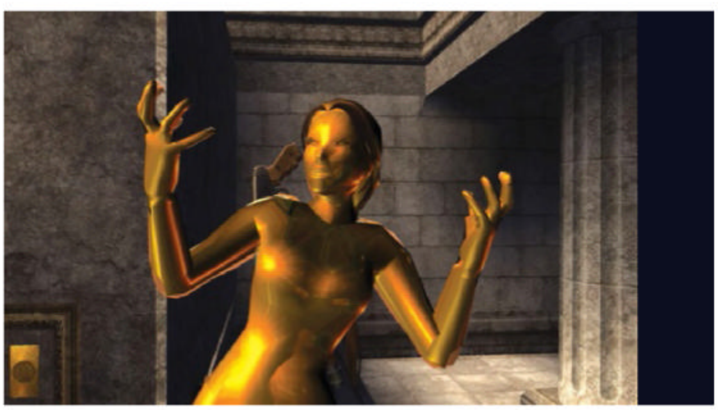
YOUNG EXPLORERS LOVE BUNCHES (TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION)

■ WHEN WE GET a flashback to young Lara in *The Last Revelation*, we see that she's got her hair tied up in bunches in place of her trademark ponytail. Maybe she was being extra-cautious – or maybe it was just Crystal Dynamics saying, "How do we make Lara look younger? …Bunches!"



WHEN UNDERWATER, DON'T ALWAYS HEAD UP (TOMB RAIDER II)

■ AFTER STRIPPING DOWN and changing into a wetsuit in front of a po-faced Tibetan Monk, Lara dives down into a cave pool to chase a submarine. After the pilot of the vessel is chewed up by a shark, you're given 30 seconds to find air. You have to fight against instinct, though: going *up* will only lead to a watery grave.



MIDAS' TOUCH IS A REAL THING (TOMB RAIDER ANNIVERSARY)

■ DEMONSTRATING SOME OF *Tomb Raider*'s most original puzzling and interesting level design, the hand of Midas is a death trap waiting to happen. Anyone who is familiar with the old Greek myth will know that Midas turns anything he touches into gold. Apparently, this also includes Lara.



THE GRAPPLE HOOK IS YOUR BEST FRIEND (TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND)

■ AS OF *TOMB RAIDER: Legend*, the technology had advanced enough to allow Lara a lot more animation freedom. As a result, she handily came across the grapple hook, which allowed her to wall run, create pulley systems and play with the game's physics to get her to new destinations and secret passages.

THE RISE AND FALL OF



The studio that brought the Birdman into our homes, slapped Bruce Willis on a PSOne and kept the Guitar Hero dream alive is no more. We look back at the ups – and downs – of Neversoft

AFTER TENS OF millions of sales, some of the highest-rated releases of all time (at least according to Metacritic) and handling some of the biggest licences in gaming, Neversoft was simply folded up and incorporated into Infinity Ward. True to form, the studio didn't go out quietly, as a cathartic burning of the Neversoft logo-cum-mascot – a skewered eyeball – was hosted outside the studio's office. And that was that. It was a sad end for a studio that, at one point, was involved in titles that pretty much everyone who has touched a videogame had played at some point. In the late-'90s there was hardly a party that went by without someone breaking out a version of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* – and some years later the same was true, this time with one of the numerous *Guitar Hero* titles Neversoft developed.

But a studio doesn't close for no reason. Its people aren't deemed more of a fit integrated into another, different studio unless there's something wrong. If Neversoft of 2014 was the same Neversoft of 15 years prior, this wouldn't have happened. Because, as with most stories of this ilk, Neversoft was a developer that flew way too close to the sun – and while its ambition and quality of output was rarely in question, it wasn't enough to avoid that plummet.


After 20 years of making games, Neversoft was merged with Infinity Ward. Former staff marked the event by burning the studio logo.

It was different in 1994, when Neversoft came into being. Malibu Interactive was a shrinking studio and Mick West, a programmer at Malibu, was asked by coworker Joel Jewett if he wanted to create a new studio: "It was Joel's idea", West told **gamesTM**, "We were all at Malibu Interactive, and lots of people were leaving to start their own companies, and it seemed like an obvious step. Joel approached me, and I suggested Chris [Ward]."

SO IT WAS that the three came together and formed Neversoft – one American (Jewett) and two native Yorkshiremen. "It helped with communication", West laughed, "although Joel couldn't understand what Chris was saying half the time at first." These communication issues didn't stop the new team from grabbing its first contract – a licensed game in 1995, based on the *Skeleton Warriors* cartoon. There's a reason you don't remember the game. Or the cartoon.

It took two years for Neversoft's next project to hit the shelves, and this wasn't even an original creation – just a port of the PC version of Shiny's *MDK*, bringing the shooter to PSOne. Then… nothing. Until fate smiled at the faltering studio, in the shape of Bruce Willis and his gurning mug.

Apocalypse released in 1998 to some fanfare – the star power of Willis and the fact it was a decent game meant it sold in the range of half a million copies. Not bad for a game Neversoft had turned around in a mere nine months. "It was originally an internal Activision project with one of its studios", West explained. "They had tried to do something very ambitious with an AI character following you around, [with] big levels and they had this complicated way of building everything.

RIDING SUCCESS

Neversoft's fortunes rode the wave, but was it all smooth sailing?

- **SKELETON WARRIORS – 80,000**
- APOCALYPSE – 450,000
- **TONY HAWK'S SKATEBOARDING – 8,460,000**
- SPIDER-MAN – 3,660,000
- **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2 – 7,250,000**
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3 – 8,050,000
- **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4 – 5,750,000**
- TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND – 6,470,000
- **TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2 – 4,920,000**
- TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND – 4,420,000
- **GUN – 2,190,000**
- TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8 – 2,500,000
- **TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND – 2,100,000**
- GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK – 16,200,000
- **GUITAR HERO: AEROSMITH – 4,170,000**
- GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR – 9,870,000
- **GUITAR HERO: METALLICA – 2,620,000**
- GUITAR HERO 5 – 4,770,000
- **BAND HERO – 3,200,000**
- GUITAR HERO: WARRIORS OF ROCK – 2,460,000
- **CALL OF DUTY GHOSTS – 22,040,000 [Neversoft developed Extinction Mode only]**

*All sales figures are approximate, from VGChartz.com

"IT WASN'T REALLY working out so Activision asked us if we could repurpose some of our stuff that we were, basically, shopping around because we didn't have any work. We took on *Apocalypse* and got it done in about nine months… It was a simple, fun, solid game that made money, and was the first solid step on the road to Neversoft's success."

After that came *the* game Neversoft is known for to this day, *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* (or *Pro Skater* outside of PAL territories). While it would be a push to say what happened to Neversoft next was luck, there is the admission from West and numerous coworkers that, going into work on *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding*, there wasn't actually much idea as to what the studio was doing. "When we were doing *Apocalypse* we knew we were doing a running-around shooting game", West said.

"We knew how to make people run around, jump and shoot. But skating was very new. It was having an open-ended, a more open-world, a trick system where you could score points. The concepts were alien to people working on the game." But by bringing in the Birdman Tony Hawk himself and with the full support of Activision – whose initial idea the game was – Neversoft ended up creating a cultural phenomenon. It's the worst-kept secret in the history of gaming, but the formula to the original bunch of Tony Hawk's games was their simplicity. "You hold down the X button to crouch and you release to jump. It's very tight, you feel like you're controlling it," West explained. "It's not like you're pressing it and something happens a tenth of a second later… It was fun to simply skate around and jump off things without really doing anything because it felt so responsive."

It was the perfect storm. Skateboarding was the new cool; the game had accessible and fun multiplayer (and compulsive single-player) action and a fantastic soundtrack. The first game sold just under 10 million copies worldwide and topped the charts pretty much everywhere. "It felt very good, because two years earlier the company very nearly closed", West said.

But before Neversoft got to releasing the second *Tony Hawk* game, it had to go about doing another seemingly impossible thing: bringing out a licensed superhero game that wasn't absolute tosh. *Spider-Man* on the PSOne was that very game, and using the power of the *Tony Hawk* engine (and judicious use of fogging) gamers were presented with a genuine great. Neversoft could do no wrong.

THIS STORY REPEATED itself for the next few years, with 2000 to 2002 seeing the *Tony Hawk* series expanded and improved upon in countless ways. The games kept getting better and better, but the increased complexity – along with the general jadedness of an audience seeing the same name on a game every year without fail and skating's fall in popularity – saw

"I STILL MEET PEOPLE THAT TELL ME THAT TONY HAWK'S WAS A HUGE PART OF THEIR YOUTH"

the series' sales take a downturn. Neversoft dropped the number and the series was reborn as *Tony Hawk's Underground* – a skateboarding adventure game that allowed players to dismount their board, speak with other characters, take part in an overarching plotline and even drive cars. Oddly, it wasn't terrible. But this generation, even though it was hopped up on skate culture offshoots *Jackass* and *Dirty Sanchez*, didn't buy into *Underground*. It didn't even really *buy* it, and sales continued to fall.

A brief segue into a decent, but forgettable western adventure in the form of *Gun* was all the original, non-licensed output seen from Neversoft in this period. The game was appreciated at the time for offering a pre-*Red Dead Redemption* '*GTA* in the Wild West', but it wasn't a sign of things to come and Neversoft didn't create any more original IP. So the studio went back to *Tony Hawk*, and for the second time there was a rebirth



It's no wonder people were put off the *Tony Hawk* series by *Underground 2* – it decided to put wackiness in the way of fun.



What do you do when a series is stale and you need to revamp it? You add in ridiculous things. Enter *Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock*.

NEVERSOFT'S FIVE BEST

Even though consistency was the studio's hallmark, there are still a few standout titles…

TONY HAWK'S SKATEBOARDING

1999 [PSOne, N64, Dreamcast, Game Boy Color, N-Gage]



■ Skateboarding was already popular, people already knew who Lagwagon and Dead Kennedys were and skating games had been released before. But somehow, *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding – Pro Skater* outside of PAL regions – felt like something completely new. A total game-changer.



SPIDER-MAN 2000 [PSOne, N64, Dreamcast, PC, Game Boy Color]

■ You have the *Tony Hawk* engine, you want to make something else. What do you do? Make a Spider-Man tie-in, obviously. Better than that, you make a *brilliant* Spider-Man tie-in. It wasn't as open as later games – and oh god, the fog – but Spidey's Neversoft adventure was undoubtedly great.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

2001 [PSOne, PS2, Gamecube, Xbox, GBC, GBA, PC, N64, Mac]

■ Every game based on the Birdman brought something new, but the revert in *Pro Skater 3* changed the combo system forever – and the *Hawk* series with it. Now combos could be *ridiculous*. And that increased the fun quota by 900 per cent.



GUITAR HERO 5

2009 [PS2, PS3, Wii, Xbox 360]

■ It took Neversoft a few tries to get to grips with what was originally Harmonix's baby – but when it did, it did it *hard* (rock). *Guitar Hero 5* was a brilliant mix of the fantastic, established mechanics with refined and improved elements everywhere else. Just don't mention the whole Kurt Cobain thing.



TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

2006 [PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360, PS3, PSP]

■ Tony went off the rail for a few years, but *Project 8* brought back balance to the grind. The magic of the originals was long gone, but there was a back-to-basics approach that resonated with players old and new. And it was a lot better than sequel *Proving Ground.*

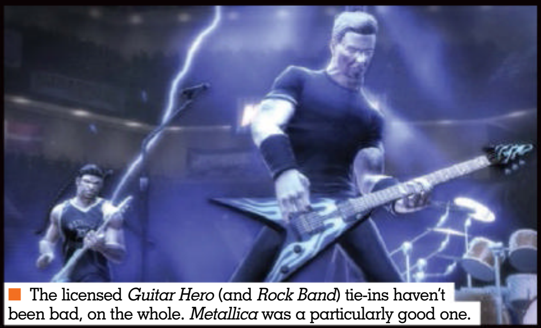
of sorts. *Tony Hawk's Project 8* – the eighth in the series, natch – came out in 2006 to criticial acclaim and an enthusiastic response from all those who bought it. But, again, the number of those picking it up had dropped once more. It was clear for all to see that the series needed a huge boost to stay relevant – a true redesign that went beyond a bit of spit and polish. As West admitted: "I don't think things went wrong, but it's hard to innovate indefinitely within a franchise. All great things come to an end, it's just a matter of when."

2007 saw the release of *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground*, which proved to be Neversoft's final shot with the Birdman. But while the series had wavered in quality – and was nowhere near as popular as in its heyday – this wasn't a decision to strip the studio of the licence. No, it was a necessary move to free up resources so Neversoft could focus on its new main project: the *Guitar Hero* franchise, which the studio had been working on since 2006.

It was a peculiar coming together that foisted the peripheral-based shredding simulator into the hands of Neversoft, with the story going that Jewett met RedOctane's founders at E3 in 2006 and told them of how the first *Guitar Hero* game had got the team through some stressful times while creating *Tony Hawk's Project 8*. That was all the founders needed to hear – Neversoft was a studio with a proven record of quick turnaround and high-quality games. It wasn't actually as strange a decision to



■ Hidden characters galore in the *Tony Hawk* games of old – and not a microtransaction in sight.



■ The licensed *Guitar Hero* (and *Rock Band*) tie-ins haven't been bad, on the whole. *Metallica* was a particularly good one.



■ Well before *Red Dead Redemption*, *Gun* moseyed into town around the launch of Xbox 360. It was decent but unspectacular.



hand *Guitar Hero* to the studio as it might have seemed at the time.

■■■ BUT WHILE THE team at Neversoft hit the ground running as they often did, managing to get *Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock* out in the same year as *Proving Ground*, there was stiff competition from the get-go: *Guitar Hero*'s original developer Harmonix brought the much-more technically accomplished *Rock Band* to market less than a month after *Guitar Hero III* hit. Immediately Neversoft's game looked – and felt – outdated.



Over the next few years it was hard to shift this perception, with reviewers and online commenters alike voicing the opinion that Neversoft's games just weren't up to the standard the Harmonix team was putting out. But none of Neversoft's initial *Guitar Hero* titles received a bad score and sales were, well, *phenomenal*. *Guitar Hero III* was, according to Activision, the first game to bring in over a billion dollars – and it racked up sales figures of around the 16.2-million mark.

So it was that Neversoft stopped being the *Tony Hawk* studio – that franchise was passed on to RoboModo, where it became another peripheral-based game and absolutely tanked before being euthanised with extreme prejudice. Neversoft instead became the custodian of a different yearly franchise – but this time around, things didn't get better and better as they went along.

Sales for *Guitar Hero* dropped for the fourth main game, *World Tour*, to around 10 million – and they never got that high again. While public opinion had warmed to Neversoft's approach for 2009's *Guitar Hero 5*, the sales didn't reflect this – and when *Warriors Of Rock* released in 2010, shifting around 2.5 million copies, Activision wound up its *Guitar Hero* wing and shut down the one-time world-leading franchise. Neversoft was, through no fault of its own, without anything to make.

There hasn't been a full game released with Neversoft's badge on it since that last-ever *Guitar Hero*, and the studio was pretty much forgotten by gamers across the globe – no longer a name synonymous with joyful parties, now just a name only ever said after the words 'whatever happened to…' It surprised a number of people to see Neversoft's involvement in *Call Of Duty: Ghosts*, but its contribution – in the form of the alien-blasting, *Left 4 Dead*-aping Extinction mode – was excellent and a highlight of an otherwise formulaic game.

"APOCALYPSE WAS A SIMPLE, FUN, SOLID GAME THAT MADE MONEY, AND WAS THE FIRST SOLID STEP ON THE ROAD TO NEVERSOFT'S SUCCESS"

■■■ EIGHT MONTHS AFTER *Ghosts*' release, Activision announced it was bringing Neversoft into the Infinity Ward fold as a result of its stellar work on the *COD* title. It wasn't as swift a death as studios have experienced before under the big publishers, but it still saw a bittersweet ending to one of gaming's fallen kings.

With all that came to pass – and West leaving the company in 2003, before the *Gun* and *Guitar Hero* years – it was still good to hear he was proud of what Neversoft had done. "[I am proud] that we created a new genre of games and set new standards for gameplay. I still meet people all the time that tell me that *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* was a huge part of their youth. That makes me feel proud."

Bottled lightning. We're unlikely to ever see another studio like Neversoft, seemingly making it up as it went along and striking very big indeed, being handed the keys to one of the biggest publishers' biggest licences and ending up an atrophied shadow of its former self. But it's not a sad story – it's pure punk rock: just the way Neversoft would have wanted it to be.



Image: Mick West

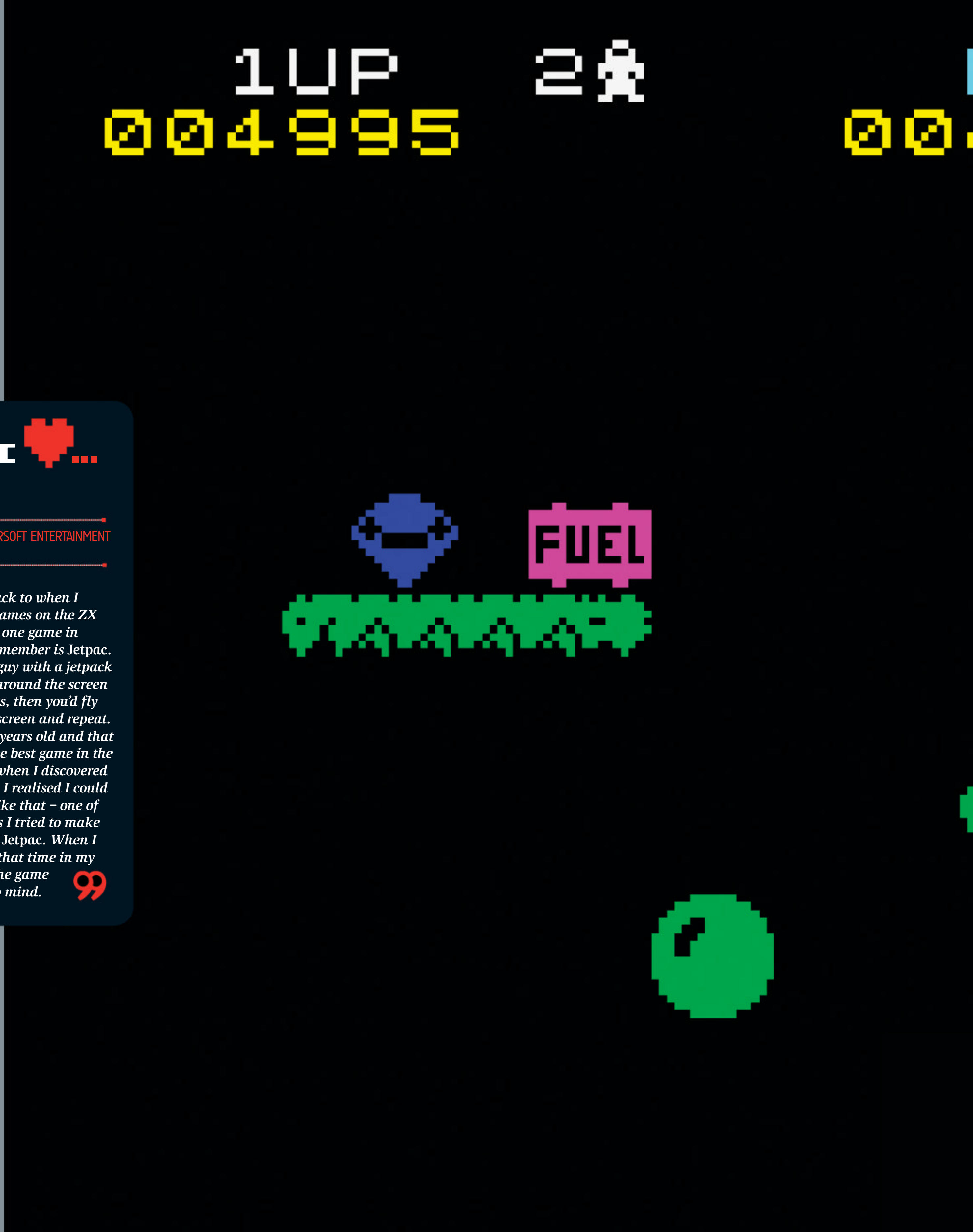
■ In 1998, Chris Ward, Mick West and Joel Jewett (the three sitting in the middle) had the world of gaming at their feet. And Ward had a wedding to get through, as this image from him shows.

WHY I ♥...

Jetpac

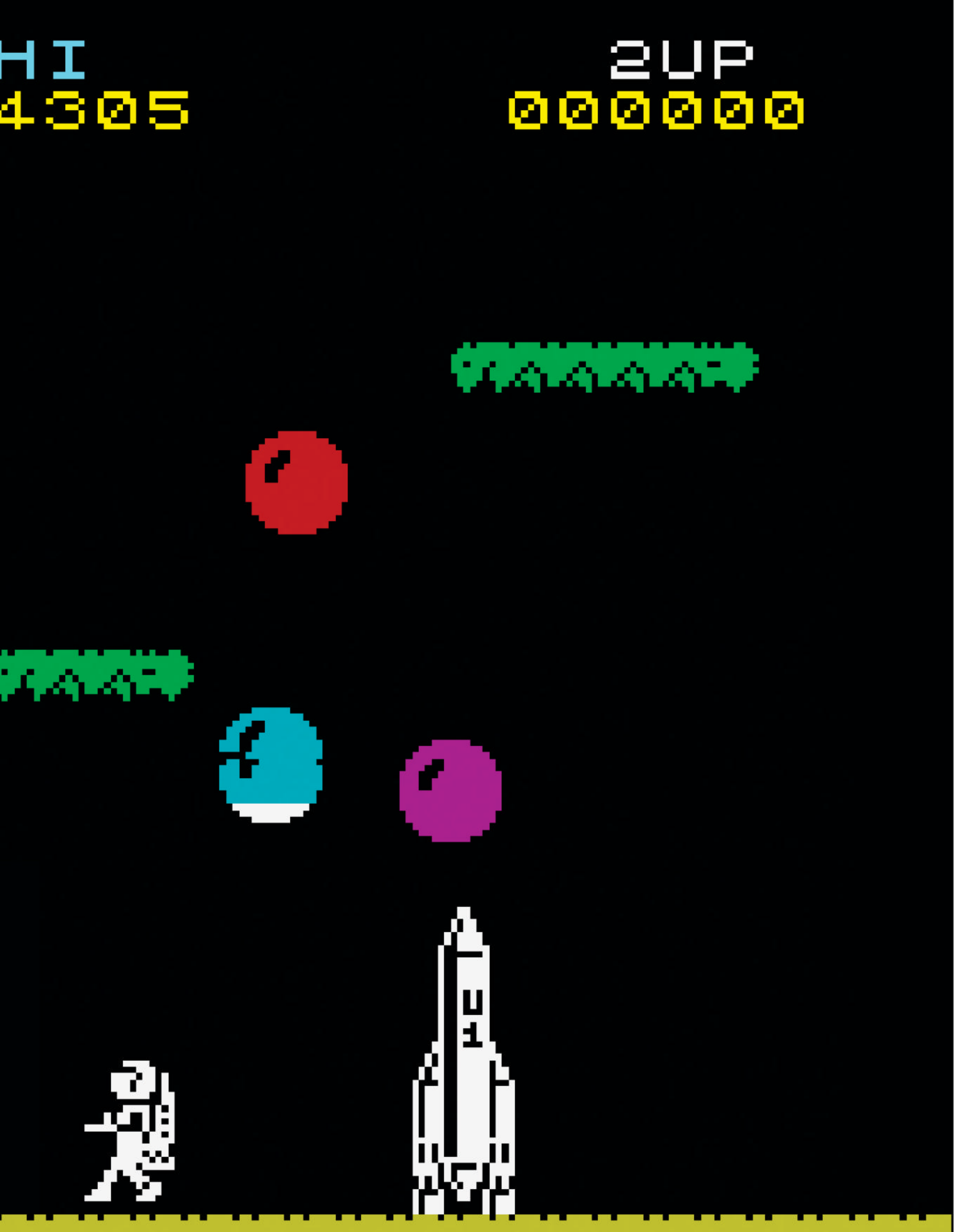
MICK WEST, NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT CO-FOUNDER

“I look back to when I played games on the ZX Spectrum and one game in particular I remember is Jetpac. It was a little guy with a jetpack and you flew around the screen shooting aliens, then you’d fly onto the next screen and repeat. I was 14 or 15 years old and that seemed like the best game in the world. Then, when I discovered programming, I realised I could make games like that – one of the first games I tried to make was a clone of Jetpac. When I think back to that time in my life Jetpac is the game that springs to mind.”



“One of the first games I tried to make was a clone of Jetpac”

MICK WEST, NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT CO-FOUNDER


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BEHIND THE SCENES

MEDIEVIL

Conceived by Millennium Interactive in 1995, the MediEvil concept proved so popular with Sony that the Japanese giant bought the Cambridgeshire studio after claiming exclusive rights to the 3D hack-n-slash adventure. Two decades on, **games™** returns to the pioneering world of Gallowmere



Released: 1998
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: SCE Cambridge Studio
Key Staff: Chris Sorrell (Producer, Director), Jason Wilson (Game Designer, Writer), Martin Pond (Writer), Andrew Barnabas (Composer), Paul Arnold (Composer, Sound Effects)



Jason Wilson continued to work on the *MediEvil* series right up to *Resurrection*.

LISTENING TO *MEDIEVIL* creators Chris Sorrell and Jason Wilson chat about videogame development in the Nineties is like listening to two friends reminiscing about the good old days. Although now miles apart, they still share fond memories of the time they spent working together at Sony Cambridge Studio, which is well-reflected in some of the stories they have to tell.

"I remember one night we'd all had our curry, which we often did working late," explains Sorrell of the laid-back attitude within the team at the time. "We were just sitting around talking about ants for some reason, about how they were such fascinating creatures. The next day we decided we were going to have an ant cave level in [*MediEvil*]. We then came up with some crazy fiction about how you'd get shrunk down, and we made it. That was something you'd never be able to do in a big-budget game these days."

Wilson chuckles in the background – as if recalling the punchline before Sorrell finishes speaking. "Better still, we ended up populating the ant cave with Cockney fairies, because, well, you know."

Although unorthodox, understanding this working ethos isn't difficult. Listening to Sorrell and Wilson affectionately recall an era of wonder and possibility conjures imagery of a development team very much enjoying its work while on top of its game. Stories like this seem to be rather fitting. Sony Cambridge Studio, as it was then, now exists as Guerilla Cambridge – a branch of Guerilla Games, responsible for 2013's PS Vita shooter *Killzone: Mercenary*, as well as an as-yet unannounced PlayStation 4 project. Prior to this, SCE Cambridge was known as Millennium Interactive – where Sorrell and Wilson first joined forces.

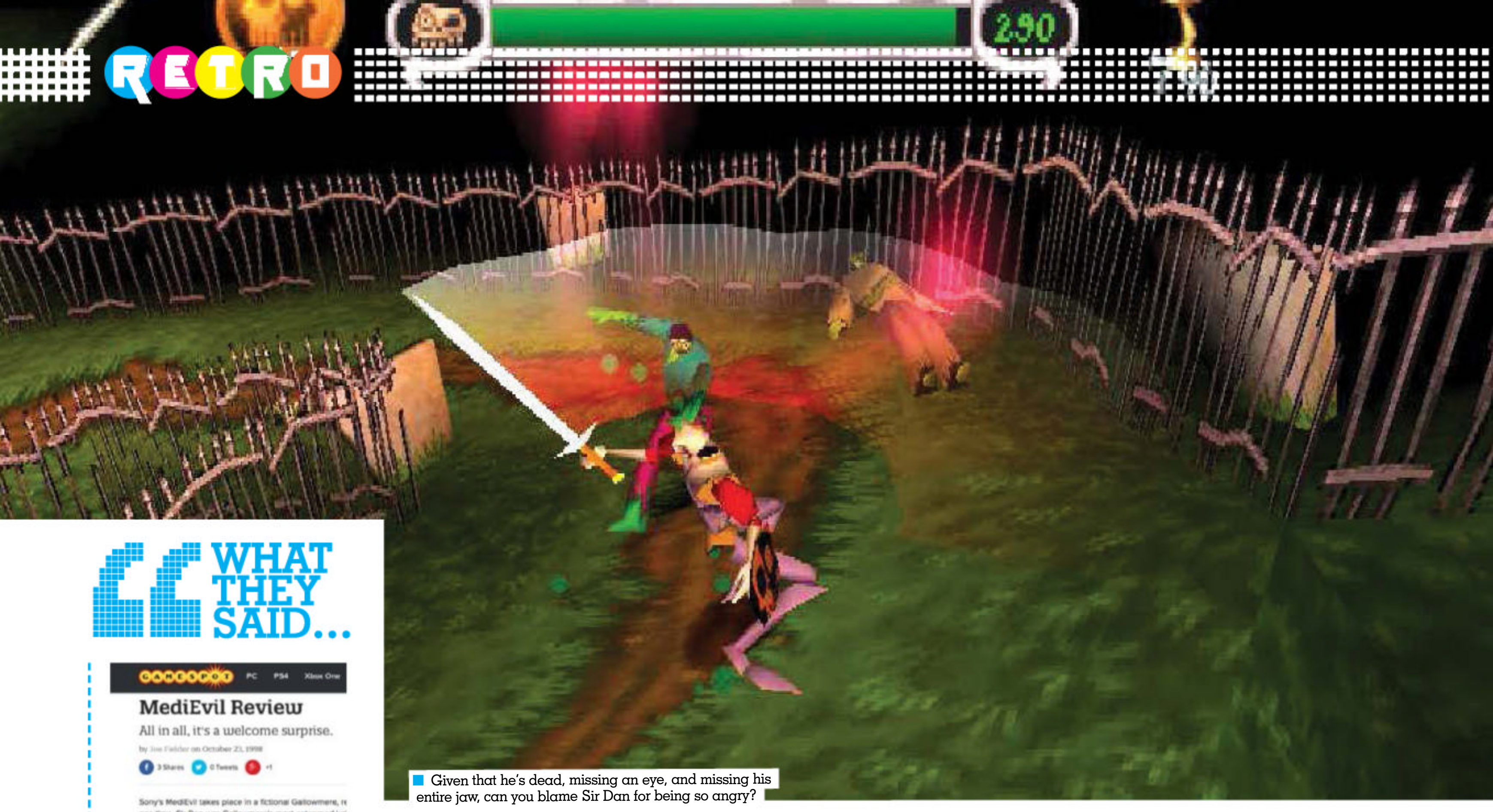
"I JOINED MILLENNIUM after finishing *James Pond 3*," explains Sorrell. "I'd been working with them for a few years when the opportunity came up to work on something new. They asked me what I wanted to make and said I'd need to be working with someone on the visual side. Jason happened to be freeing up on whatever projects he was working on at the time. So we met up and started working on *MediEvil*."

Like Sorrell, Wilson had worked elsewhere – "another child of Eighties development," as he puts it – before a conversation with Millennium's development director, Ian Saunter, led him to taking a full-time post there. "In early 1995, Ian convinced me to help Chris start *MediEvil*," he says. "I'd met Chris before when I was a freelancer and we both loved horror movies and zombies and stuff like that – way before it was popular. It was a very good match." In those days, says Sorrell, developers who were already actively making games, were often offered the chance to champion their own projects further down the line. With the esteemed *James Pond* series and its spin-offs under his belt, Sorrell more than met this prerequisite and begun laying the foundations for *MediEvil* in late-1995.

While pulling together a demo to showcase to publishers, the team operated in the smallest possible configuration: a programmer for each platform, as

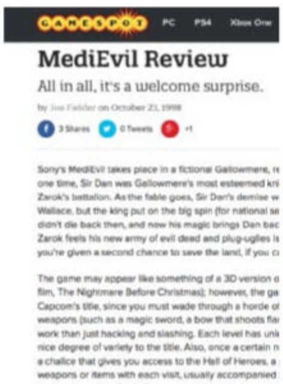



MEDIEVIL



Given that he's dead, missing an eye, and missing his entire jaw, can you blame Sir Dan for being so angry?

WHAT THEY SAID...


GAMESPOT PC PS4 Xbox One

MediEvil Review

All in all, it's a welcome surprise.

3 Shares 0 Tweets +1

Sony's MediEvil takes place in a fictional Gallowmere, ri
one time, Sir Dan was Gallowmere's most esteemed kni
Zarok's battalion. As the fable goes, Sir Dan's demise w
Wallace, but the king put on the big spin (for national se
didn't die back then, and now his magic brings Dan bac
Zarok feels his new army of evil dead and plug-uglies is
you're given a second chance to save the land, if you ca

The game may appear like something of a 3D version o
film, The Nightmare Before Christmas); however, the ga
Capcom's title, since you must wade through a horde of
weapons (such as a magic sword, a bow that shoots fla
work than just hacking and slashing. Each level has uni
nice degree of variety to the title. Also, once a certain n
a chalice that gives you access to the Hall of Heroes, a
weapons or items with each visit, usually accompanied

The real stars of *MediEvil* though are its variety, story, and difficulty level. As mentioned before, the diversity found from level to level adds a lot to the game, as does the wide and varied arsenal of weapons. The storyline is also strangely engrossing

Gamespot (October 23, 1998)

well as two or three artists with Wilson on the art and design side of things. Although having worked on several titles up to this point, Millennium was not in great health financially, and sought to secure a publisher for *MediEvil* as soon as possible.

SEGA AND MICROSOFT showed initial interest and demo versions for the Saturn and Windows 95 were rolled out in the first year of production. After delivering what Sorrell declares the team's "best pitch ever", though, Sony got behind the *MediEvil* IP with one caveat: that it be a PSOne exclusive.

The team obliged and within six months of working together, Sony bought over Millenium Interactive – SCE Cambridge Studio becoming Sony's only other UK studio besides its London office in July 1997. With Sony's input came more manpower, more structure, and crucially, more funding. Yet as a group of keen and ambitious twenty-something-year-olds, cash was never at the forefront of any of their minds. Instead, it was the complexities of designing games in 3D – a style that the industry was only just getting to grips with.

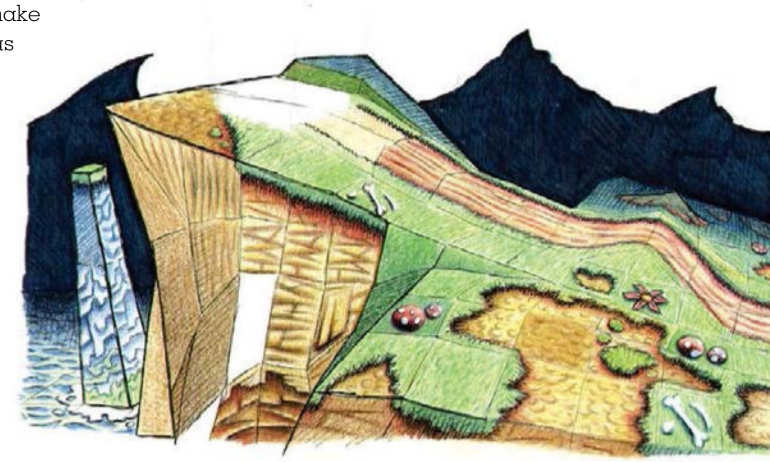
"I guess we were all young and naive in terms of budget stuff," says Sorrell. "We just wanted to make the games that we wanted to make, and I was always focused on making as big and as cool a game as I could. For me it was always that mix of *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, combined with a Tim Burton art style, and also doing all of this in 3D, which at the time was a relatively new thing. It was no foregone conclusion that each game would be 3D, so really it was the fusion of all of those things that was the starting point for *MediEvil*.

"It was a huge learning project for all of us as it was our first 3D project. It was very much us finding our feet and deciding on all the things we wanted to do that we didn't really know if we could. We were just trying things out and learning a lot from other games at the time, like *Mario 64*."

"Yeah, we didn't really have much going in," adds Wilson. "When we started out with *MediEvil*, it felt like really pioneering days of 3D technology and polygons and so on. I remember Chris and I in our little skeleton crew – no pun intended – working all manner of crazy hours and getting an actual 3D model on screen at, say, three o'clock in the morning, and it being this really momentous moment.

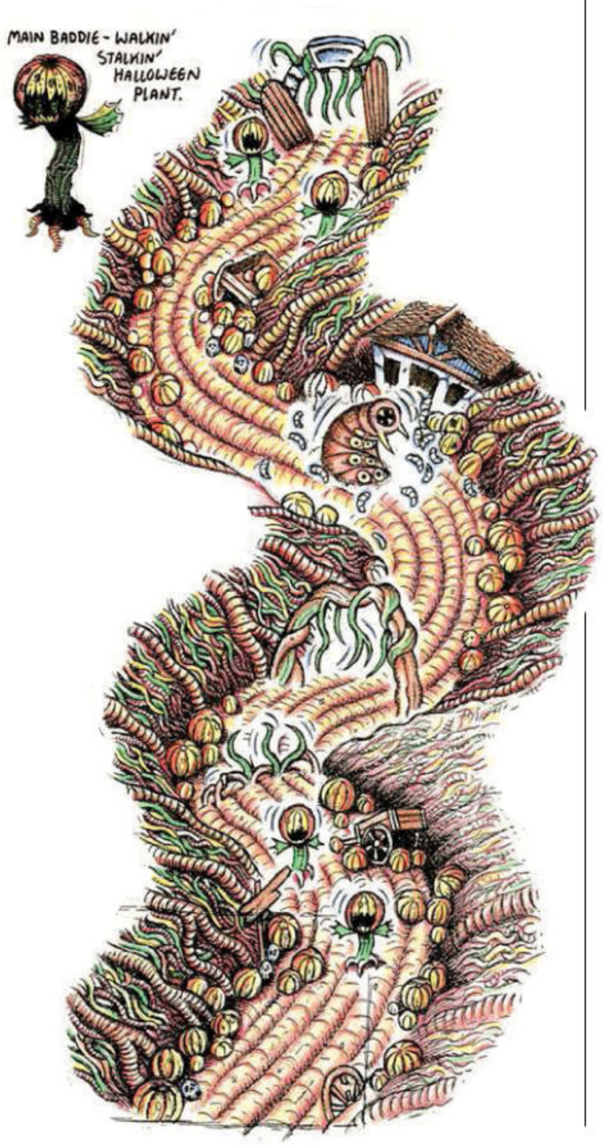
WE WERE JUST TRYING THINGS OUT AND LEARNING A LOT FROM OTHER GAMES AT THE TIME, LIKE MARIO 64

"You couldn't really get that nowadays because everything is possible, and everything has been done in a strange technical sort of way. Every little step we



made was like, 'Wow, that's so cool!' The good thing about Chris is that he allowed me to design some of the technology that we'd need to drive the art, so it was a really good relationship between the tech guys and Chris and myself. I look back at some of the documents of the things I wrote, or I drew – actual crayon drawings, little polygons of an environment, things like that – and it felt like pre-Photoshop, pre-Maya, and all these amazing packages we have nowadays. Instead, it was gluing things together and bits of string and literally bits of paper, and then trying, struggling desperately to get something that looks half-decent on screen. It was really small beginnings, but it was great!"

From the outset, it was clear Sorrell and Wilson were on the same wavelength. An affinity for all things horror, particularly that of Tim Burton's kooky gothic range, drove much of *MediEvil*'s aesthetics; and *The Crow*'s tale of undead avenger seeking revenge for murder loosely mirrored the game's narrative. At prototype stage, *MediEvil* went by the name of *Dead Man Dan*, a nod to the game's one-eyed protagonist Sir Daniel Fortesque, but it wasn't until much later that Dan's story was fully realised.





PRIOR TO THE Sony takeover, *MediEvil* posed a simple tale about a skeletal knight who'd hack and slash his way through hordes of zombie armies with little purpose or meaning, so when external scriptwriter Martin Pond suggested redemption as a core theme Sorrell and Wilson happily went with it. In turn, flesh was added to the bones of the concept and Wilson was able to craft more cohesive environments around what was now a more intuitive story. The rest of the character ensemble was born from necessity, designed to revolve around Sir Dan's central role.

Although Wilson admits games like *Mario 64* and *Zelda* influenced *MediEvil*'s makeup, he is proud of the unique worlds he and his team were able to create within the Kingdom of Gallowmere. Like much of Burton's work, *MediEvil*'s Gothic landscapes make it instantly recognisable – the distinguished settings often playing as big a part as Sir Dan himself.

"One thing I really liked about *MediEvil*, which I don't think was ever captured again in any other Sony Cambridge game, was the sense of the environments," he explains. "[They] were based heavily on German Expressionism, which is what Tim Burton based a lot of his early stuff on – that means lots of wonky, weird angles to the environments. We'd build villages and towns on domes, so that all the buildings were all coming off the central axes. The camera would be orchestrated to move over this dome, creating rolling environments, and adding some really strange otherworldly cameras and perspectives to the world. We could orchestrate enemy attacks and what we wanted to show at various points, while giving the player a degree of control over the camera. We were very ambitious when I think back to it."

This ambition, coupled with a unique sense of humour, is what drove Sony Cambridge Studio forward with *MediEvil* in its formative years. Videogames to this day have largely struggled to convey humour with any level of finesse, yet *MediEvil* captured charming slapstick comedy like none other before it. Better still, each joke was a natural reflection of how the team worked behind the scenes, as opposed to a vetted process at the commanding hand of a publisher. Sorrell labels the comedy as a "happy accident" and

LIGHTS, ACTION, CAMERAS!

Creator Chris Sorrell explains the importance of finding the right camera angle

ON GETTING IT WRONG:

"I never thought about how difficult the idea of following a character around was until we actually came to do it. Initially we went for a spline camera – where the view is very much in the artist's control. I was becoming increasingly irritated by how this style gave you no freedom to feel like you were exploring the world. I was fighting to get rid of it as soon as we had it."

ON GETTING IT RIGHT:

"That's one of the cool things you get in 3D that you just don't have in 2D: a sense of exploring. What's behind that, or in that box, or on top of that cliff? That, for me, was part of the experience that I wanted to make in the game. We changed it to a more free-form camera and it just worked."



RATS THAT GO SPLAT

The twisted humour of the MediEvil team

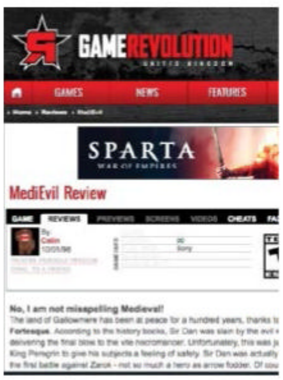
■ WHEN *MEDIEVIL* RELEASED to the masses in 1998, the majority of reviews at the time remarked on the game's unique sense of humour. Creator Chris Sorrell admits he injected comedy only where it felt appropriate, and that it wasn't necessarily a conscious thing.

"We had a programmer working with us who was the lead on the project," tells Sorrell. "He came from a business background… I guess he always struggled a bit to match the way that the rest of us were making the game and our perspective on things with his slightly stuffy business background.

"He was a big fan of rats. He loved his pet rat, he was always going on about them. This is a bit of sad story in a way, but towards the end of the project we'd drifted apart in terms of how much he enjoyed working on a project that wasn't quite being made the way he was used to making them. He ended up leaving us about two months before the end. We [made] it so that you could squash the rats. I guess that comes from a slight feeling of betrayal. We did have a lot of good times with him, though!"



WHAT THEY SAID…



As you might have guessed, the designers obviously had a distinct sense of humour that permeates the game, and, at times, has you laughing out loud. In the end, what we have here is one of the cleverest platform games ever made

GameRevolution (October 1, 1998)

that no one set out to make the game funny, per se. Instead, if the opportunity to inject humour into the script presented itself they simply took it, and *MediEvil* became all the better for it. "The humour within the team itself was natural because we were such a coercive little tight group," says Wilson. "We were all youthful and silly, who liked bizarro horror movies and slapstick comedy – it was just a natural extension of our personalities, I think. We certainly didn't overthink it."

The determined but laid-back attitude of the *MediEvil* masterminds is perhaps best outlined by the Sony takeover itself. In the close-knit, personable days of Millennium there was no such concept as a staff conference, so the formal, business-like approach of Sony became quite intimidating for Sorrell and Wilson. Although they both considered themselves professionals, the boardroom ethos of the Sony execs they were dealing with had them occasionally second-guessing themselves.

Although Sony's acquisition of Millennium had essentially come from the Japanese tech giant's interest in *MediEvil*, the takeover also brought about a distinct level of expectation on the *MediEvil* team. If Sony was devoting quite so much interest and resources to this game, it naturally expected a return on its investment.

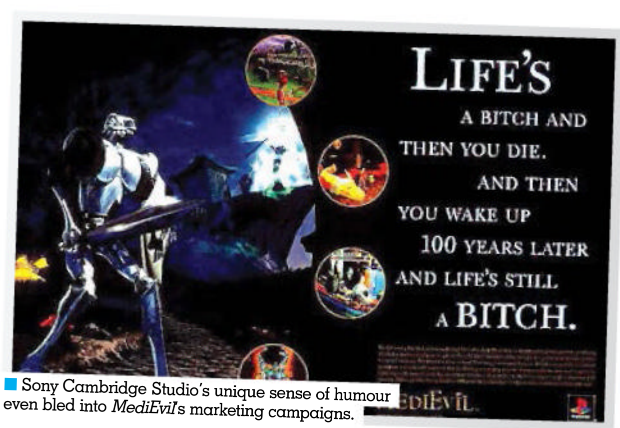
"It sort of came home to me when we first had a big staff conference, which was a totally alien concept," recalls Sorrell. "Sony would actually get everyone together from all the studios and fly you off somewhere – I think we went to Tenerife for the first one – and they'd expect you to stand up and talk in front of everybody about what you were doing and things. That was like, 'woah, we're not in Kansas anymore!' It was a strange thing.

"I also got to go to a few meetings early on where all the Sony producers got together and it all felt suddenly like we were part of a big project by that stage and the stakes were so much higher. I'd never worked as part of a big studio before, so it was a bit of a wake up to realise there were all these people who were actually really experienced in all these positions and really knew what they were talking about – it made me question 'do I know what I'm talking about? Do I know what I'm doing? Should I be here?' But yeah, we got through it."

THE END RESULT WAS SOMETHING THAT WE WERE PROUD OF AND WE HAD A LOT OF FUN

■■■ AT THE TIME, Sony was relatively unproven on the world stage as far as videogames were concerned, and Wilson points out that it was very much learning at the same time then Sony Cambridge was. Granted, expectations were high, but the Cambridge team suddenly had so many state-of-the-art facilities at its fingertips. As the new kids on the block, both Wilson and Sorrell commend the proportionately stand-offish approach Sony took with them at the time.

"*MediEvil* definitely benefitted from not being a designed product," continues Sorrell. "It wasn't designed to start a franchise or any of the pretension that is there with any big modern development nowadays. I actually caught the end of someone doing a playthrough of [*MediEvil*] recently at the end part where Zarok has been defeated and he's doing his final spell curse. Suddenly a rock falls from the ceiling. It's still ridiculous and stupid, but I don't think anyone would do that kind of thing now – they'd be thinking of keeping Zarok around for the sequel."



■ Sony Cambridge Studio's unique sense of humour even bled into *MediEvil*'s marketing campaigns.

> GAMING EVOLUTION

Mario 64 > MediEvil > MediEvil 2



In the mid-90s, 3D games were still finding their feet but *Mario 64* showed just how the transition from 2D should be done.



Seeing what worked in other games, *MediEvil* introduced us to Gallowmere – a brilliant Tim Burton-inspired nightmarescape.





Bloody hell – *Night At The Museum 4* took a strange turn for the worse!

In 2000, *MediEvil* did receive a sequel, but when the original released in 1998, Sorrell was admittedly "*MediEvil*'d out". He went on to work on PlayStation 2's *Primal*, although the intervening period made him regret leaving Gallowmere behind quite so soon. Wilson continued with number two and recalls seeing the same underlying ideas from different perspectives as strange but interesting in equal measure.

In 2005 an entirely new team took on a PSP remake named *Resurrection*, and while Sorrell and Wilson offered advice and consultation, it was done so at arm's length and without any sense of ownership – something that didn't sit well with Sorrell. Although able to accept some of the changes the new team had made, he felt that he and his team's *MediEvil* vision was what made the series – a fact accentuated by the glowing reviews the original received seven years prior.

Which is why, ten years on, speaking of *MediEvil*'s legacy with Sorrell seems a touch bittersweet. He appears glad it was left behind before it had the chance to evolve into something too unfamiliar, yet he'd also love to revive the series in some way or form given how much fun he had while developing it – a process that began two decades ago. The IP is now very much under Sony's control though, so the chances of this ever happening are most unlikely.

In the meantime, Sorrell and Wilson have long since left *MediEvil* behind. Sorrell lives in Canada and is working on his own indie title, while Wilson has returned to his first love: illustrating comic books. Yet *MediEvil* marked some of the most exciting years of their careers to date.

"I think you feel nostalgia for the development ethos more than the actual game itself, even though I really like the game," says Wilson. "It's just that time of possibility and naivety. I think sometimes the more companies can inflict process and knowledge on you, the less you know; the more you know the less you know, in a way. You become more fearful of creativity and question yourself. When I look at *MediEvil*, I see naivety and joy and the enthusiasm of making games.

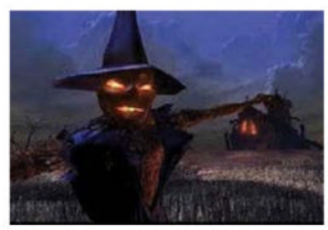
"Also, it's really strange – I remember when I used to love sci-fi movies and TV shows and you think about all the little things in the stories and the trivial information you dwell upon. There are forums about *MediEvil* on the internet where the users debate every detail of the game. Half the things we just made up on the spot! It just proves to me that lots of things are just made up in TV and movies, but other people end up taking them really seriously."

Both Sorrell and Wilson speak so fondly of their time at Sony Cambridge Studio that working on *MediEvil* truly seems like the highlight of their games development careers. "Yeah, I'd say it was," agrees Sorrell. "That sort of feeling of team that we had then, we all got on really well, we'd all had highs and lows together working long hours. Overall, though, the end result was something that we were all proud of and we had a lot of fun making it. You can't get much better than that."



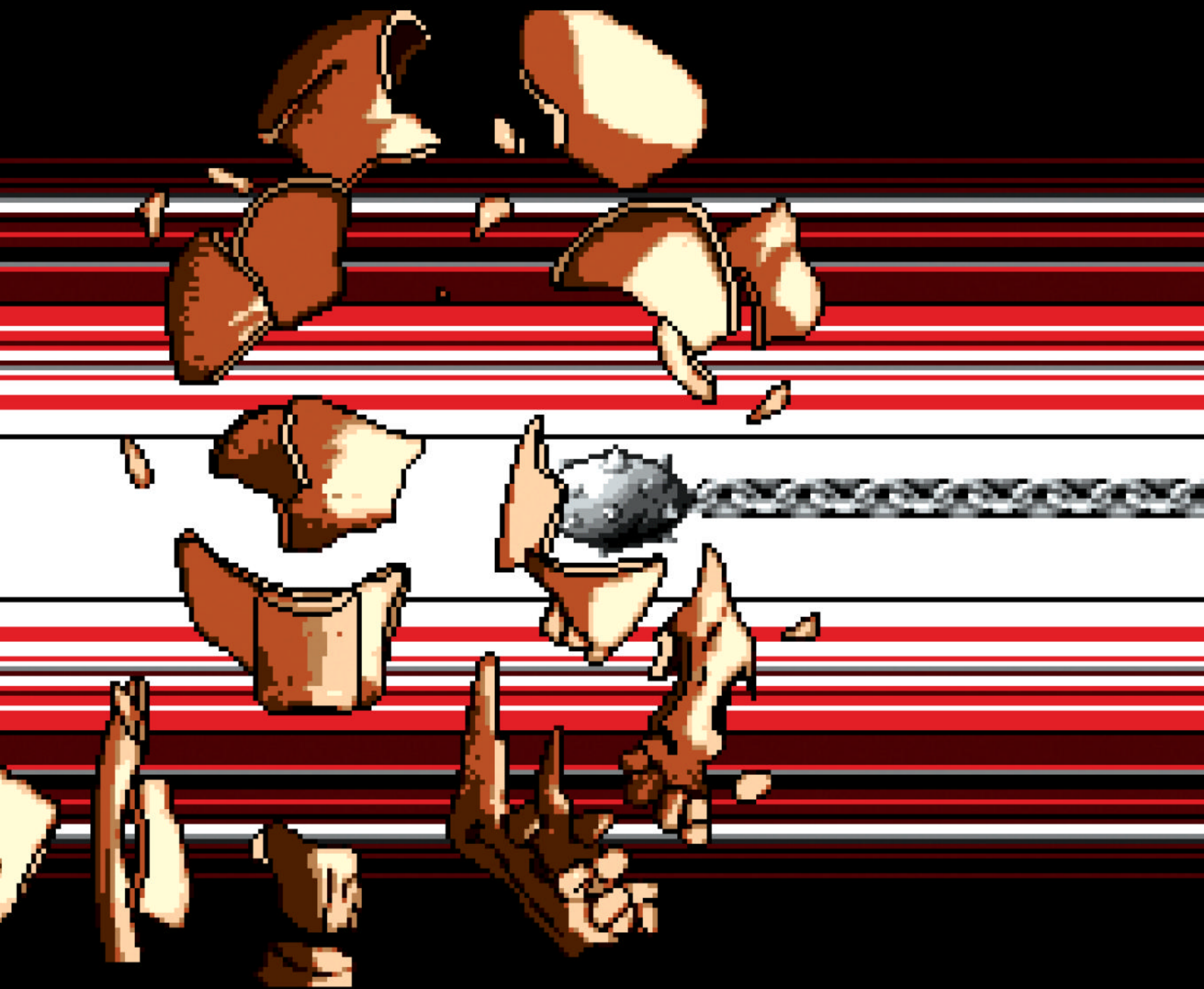
Sir Daniel Fortesque is a cocky protagonist for a dead guy with no jaw and one functioning eye.







Tim Burton's influence can be seen unashamedly throughout *MediEvil*'s crooked and wonky architecture.



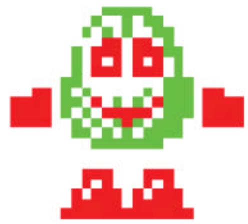


BEST INTRO

CASTLEVANIA: RONDO OF BLOOD
PC ENGINE CD **1993**

RONDO OF BLOOD never saw a Western release on the PC Engine CD – the earliest we saw it was on a Virtual Console release in 2010. And that's a damn shame, because the game was one of the better *Castlevania* games released in the early Nineties. The intro we've printed here is actually three stages of animated opening showing the 19-year-old protagonist, Richter Belmont, hurl his chained Vampire Killer whip at a skeleton under Dracula's control. It's a great way of showing you that *Rondo Of Blood* is abiding to some key *Castlevania* tropes – mainly that the main character is a Belmont, that he has a whip, and that you'll be battling the undead in a side-scrolling adventure. It's also a showcase of the gorgeous colours and sharp edges the CD was capable of rendering.





RETRO

INTERVIEW

CODING BACK THE YEARS

Best known for co-founding Codemasters, David Darling has had a hand in some of gaming's best-known games, in a career spanning over three decades

Dubbed "whiz-kids" in the Eighties by a national press still coming to terms with a home-computing revolution, the Darling brothers, Richard and David, made their name – and money – producing simple but easily marketable budget games. Having originally sold their ever-growing number of titles direct to the public via mail order, they went on to work for developer Mastertronic before leaving, with the backing and help of dad Jim, to found Codemasters. David became the corporate face of the company, his business acumen helping to steer the publisher from budget to full-price, delivering iconic brands from Dizzy to Micro Machines to Colin McRae Rally in the process. Now heading up iOS game developer Kwalee – as well as having been awarded a CBE – he is ready do it all over again.

Since you were born in 1966, you were still at school when the videogame industry as we know it was in its infancy. What is your earliest gaming memory?

My family lived for a while in Vancouver in Canada and we used to go from the city to Vancouver Island on the ferry. They would have arcade games on board, such as *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Asteroids*, and my brother Richard and I loved to play them. My dad had also bought us both an Atari VCS and we loved to play games like *Adventure* on it.

Did playing these games make you want to create your own games at the time, or did that come later for you?

I was learning to program because our maths teacher had got a computer, the name of which escapes me, and we had to program it using punched cards. It was laborious but it got me into programming. I'd stay behind at school to program it to use the only keyboard available – it was the only chance I got because there were around 40 children in the day all wanting to have a go on it.

Did it lead to you wanting a computer of your own?

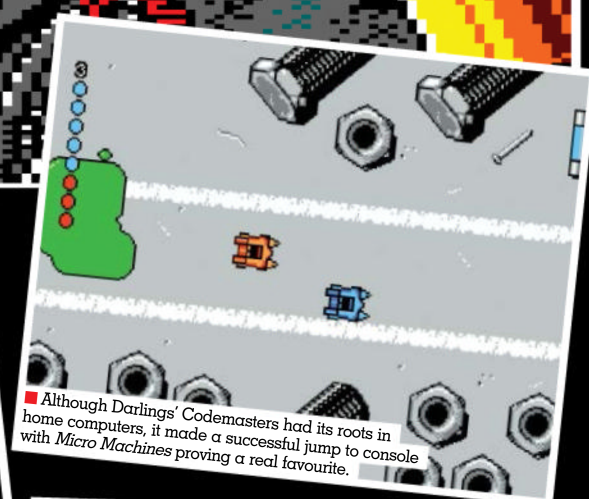
It did, but my dad had a Commodore PET. He was designing contact lenses in a laboratory and the engineers were working out the curvature of the lenses and other things using pencils and paper. My dad thought it would be better to do it on a computer so he bought one. The engineers didn't know how to program it so they asked me and my brother if we could help with the equations. We said we would if we could borrow the PET at the weekends.

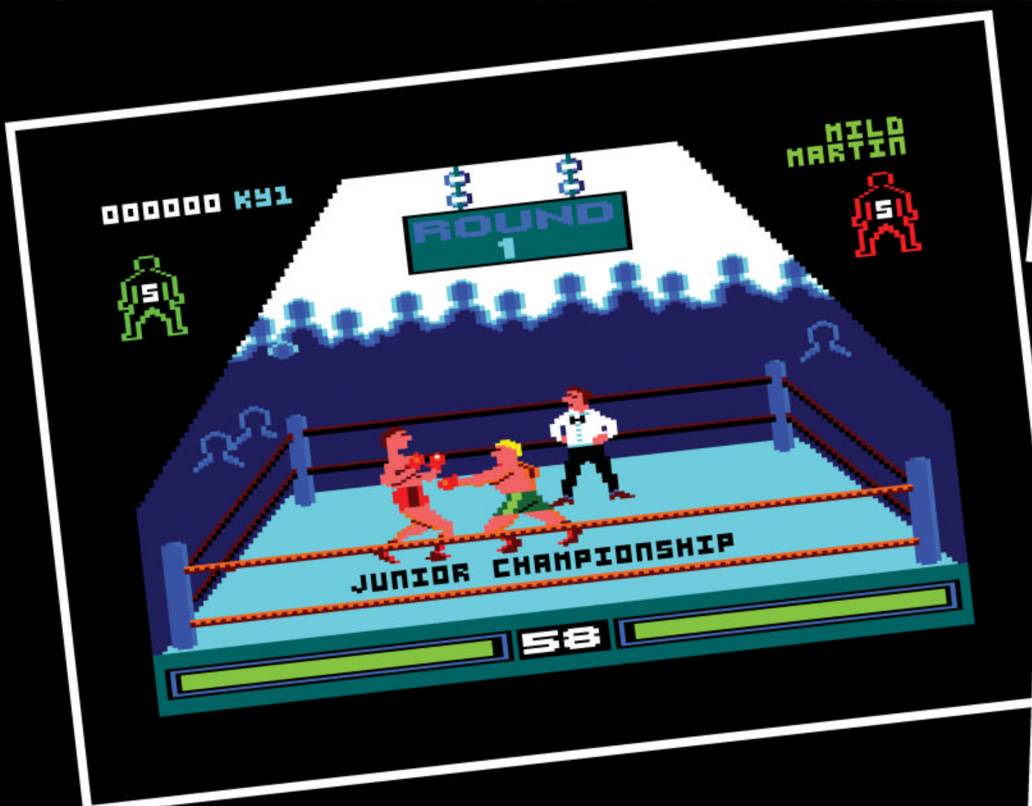
WE WEREN'T TRYING TO PICK A FIGHT WITH THE BIGGEST GAMES COMPANY IN THE WORLD

What did you do with the PET?

We were really into *D&D* and we wanted to make a *D&D* game so that's what we used it for. We only programmed in a form of BASIC and it was a text adventure just for us to enjoy. We didn't sell the game.




Although Darlings' Codemasters had its roots in home computers, it made a successful jump to console with *Micro Machines* proving a real favourite.



"ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT"



IN THE EARLY days, Codemasters games would carry glowing endorsements. "WE'RE HOOKED" said The Oliver twins about their own game, *Kwik Snax*. David Darling provided many of these self-congratulating quotes: "BRILLIANT!", he wrote for *Mig-29 Soviet Fighter*, while "absolutely brilliant" became a catchphrase. "I believed our games were good and I didn't care telling people", he says. "It may have been unusual but that's never stopped us doing something."

DAVID DARLING, CODEMASTERS CO-FOUNDER



■ The young Darling brothers, David and Richard, began coding when they were just 11 and started their first company at age 16.

Did it whet your appetite for games?
We had a friend called Michael Hiebert who had a similar passion for gaming and so we'd program together. Then in 1981, I think, his family bought a Commodore VIC-20 which we used to create versions of *Galaxian*, *Defender* and *Pac-Man*. But then my brother and I got sent back to England to go to school and we lived with our grandparents in Somerset while the rest of the family lived in Vancouver. We bought another VIC-20 but we kept in contact with Michael. We'd have a competition with him over who could make the best games. Over a few months we'd managed to produce quite a few VIC-20 games between us.

What led you to working for Mastertronic?
We'd saved up our pocket money to place an advert in a magazine called *Popular Computing Weekly*, calling ourselves Galactic Software. A few days later we got tons of letters through the post with cheques from people wanting to buy our games. We stayed up all night duplicating them and sending them out, before getting a company involved to do this for us when it all got too much. We started to sell more and more eventually Mastertronic saw one of our adverts and asked if we would write games for them.



■ *Chiller* was one of David and Richard Darling's first games. It was produced for Mastertronic and sold for £1.99.

Did you enjoy your time at Mastertronic?
It was good fun. They were entrepreneurial and their background was selling video tapes, movies and short films. But they wanted to get into the computer games market. Back then, it was all full price but Mastertronic saw an opportunity for budget games. We made lots of games for them. *Chiller* was a big game [it sold around 280,000 copies] and *BMX Racers* did very well too. I also wrote a car game called *The Last V8*.

Why did you leave Mastertronic?
Richard, my dad and I had set up a development house in a joint venture with Mastertronic called Artificial Intelligence Products, but we wanted to control our own destiny. We sold our shares, exited the firm and used the money to start Codemasters.

What were Codemasters' early years like?
It was like a family, or at least a little community and it grew fast. There was Philip and Andrew Oliver, or the Oliver Twins, and the Falcus Brothers, Darren and Jason, as well as an artist called Andy Graham and a programmer called Peter Williamson. As things got bigger, we started to run out of room in the Codemasters office and so we had a small village made up of portable cabins in the grounds with different people in each one. It was like a community of developers – not a hippy community but people passionate about computer games.

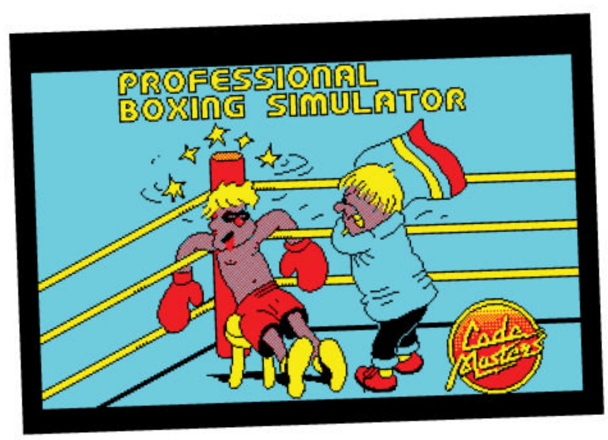
***BMX Simulator* was the Codies' first game, right?**
Yes. Richard had written *BMX Racers* at Mastertronic, which was probably like an endless runner before *Temple Run* – a vertical-scrolling BMX game. So when we started Codemasters, we decided to do another, but this time with a top-down view. We also wanted the game to be more realistic and have laps. We used to do some BMXing ourselves and a big part of the fun was the bent corners, so we put those in too. Then we added two players on the keyboard and two on the joystick. It was actually the first four-player game on the Commodore 64.

That wasn't the only first for Codemasters.
No, it wasn't. When we came up with the J-Cart for the Sega Mega Drive, we were able to add to extra gamepad ports so we were the first to introduce four players to one console and eight with joypad sharing.

DEVELOPER COMMENTS

"■■■ *BMX SIMULATOR* WASN'T the only game with the S-word in its title. There was *Grand Prix Simulator*, *Pro Boxing Simulator*, *Super Tank Simulator*, *Pro Powerboat Simulator* and *Fruit Machine Simulator* to name but a few. Your Sinclair even created an *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator*. "We'd noticed that Mastertronic's best sellers were games based on football or BMXs, where there was a pre-existing popularity. We weren't trying to create real simulators, just games that reflected real life.""

DAVID DARLING, CODEMASTERS CO-FOUNDER



You were certainly successful with your games. *Dizzy* was huge. How did that come about?
We were at a computer-game exhibition in London and wanted to find some more programmers to work with us. The Oliver twins stopped by our stand and showed us *Super Robin Hood,* which we agreed to publish. We went on to publish *Ghost Hunters* and we asked them to create *Grand Prix Simulator* for us. A few weeks later, they said they had been working on an egg-shaped character and I wasn't very enthusiastic. I couldn't see what was interesting about it, but we didn't want to stifle their creativity so we said we'd go with it. *Dizzy* was a much bigger success than we were expecting. Every time we published another one, it seemed to build the audience.

And what about *Micro Machines*?
Micro Machines on NES is still my favourite game. It's good fun and you can get a group of people together and laugh your head off with them for hours. It worked great when it was first released in 1991 and *Micro Machines V3* was brilliant on the PlayStation too.

Not all of your innovations were readily accepted by the industry though. When you launched the Game Genie, Nintendo objected and Codemasters ended up in a legal battle. Was it a difficult period?
Well, it wasn't a David and Goliath battle – we weren't trying to pick a fight with the biggest games company in the world. We were having a brainstorming session, thinking of the best Nintendo things we could do, wanting to explore the electronics side. We didn't have a licence to create Nintendo games so we found a way of bypassing Nintendo's lock-out chip and released games that way. We had an idea of placing a switch on the cartridge to add extra lives, weapons and things like that. Then we made the mental leap of saying that if we could do this with our own games, then maybe we could build an interface for other people's games too. It was a game that morphed into an industry.

IT WAS LIKE A COMMUNITY OF DEVELOPERS – NOT A HIPPY COMMUNITY BUT PEOPLE PASSIONATE ABOUT GAMES

And Nintendo hated it.
It did. But we'd tested the Game Genie in schools, patented it and put two years of our lives into it. We went to Taiwan to organise chip and cartridge manufacturing. So when Nintendo said it didn't like it, we had to carry on.

Could Codemasters have gone bust if Nintendo had won and stopped you selling the Game Genie?
I expect so, yes. It would have been a massive setback and a missed opportunity. But the judge said it was legal and that Nintendo couldn't stop it from being sold. I don't think we ever thought we'd lose, though.



As was popular in the early Eighties, the Darlings sold their games via mail order, placing an ad – for Galactic Software in this case – in *Popular Computing Weekly.*

Was Codemasters expanding quickly during the Nineties?
We'd got off to a flying start with Codemasters and our games were going to number one in the charts straightaway. I think in the first year we had 27 per cent of the market share according to the Gallup charts. Our biggest challenge in the industry was more about transitioning between platforms; moving from the VIC-20 to the Commodore 16 and Commodore 64, the Dragon 32, the Spectrum, the Atari ST and the Amiga. Then later we had the consoles – 3D with the PlayStation and Dreamcast in particular. There was always a danger that if you supported the wrong format like the Atari Jaguar, that you would risk a lot of development resources.





How did you avoid that?
With a lot of attention to detail. We were so close to the industry and so involved. We weren't only creating games but playing them so we had an intuition and a feeling of the best technology. We'd work out what would be too expensive, what would work and what wouldn't. We had a strong feeling the PlayStation would work in the mid-1990s. It was a brilliant console and we had some great successes like *Colin McRae Rally,* which did well on the PS2 as well.

The 2000s were good for you personally – you won the UK National Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2000 and you were awarded a CBE in 2008…
It was good. It's always good to have achievements.

But why call time on the Codies in 2007?
It was the right time, really. We'd grown the company from the beginning of the industry and it had become the largest developer in Europe and one of only two big ones in the UK – us and Eidos. We'd involved lots of other people in the business and it was time to move on.

What did you do?
I renovated my house, reflected on the changes in the [gaming] industry and explored getting into the design of robots, but then I became excited by the iPhone and saw the potential in people's pockets, [and] the way you could download games and play them without discs, CDs or tapes. I wanted to make games on the iPhone so I set up Kwalee.

And how is Kwalee doing?
We have 20 people working at Kwalee and we're investing in the company and growing it. We're looking for more artists and programmers and we want to make games with bigger teams. The possibility for growth is bigger now than it was in the Eighties when it was basically a British market. It's global now and a hit can go massive. Gaming is as exciting now as it was when making Spectrum games, and I think it's in my blood because I got involved at such an early age.

GAME CHANGERS

GOLDENEYE 007

Released:1997 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Rare **System:** Nintendo 64



GoldenEye became the N64's third best selling game of all time, with incredible critical acclaim and multiplayer appeal contributing to its 8 million sales.

More than just a movie tie-in, Rare's seminal first-person shooter rewrote the genre playbook and provided Nintendo's console with a multiplayer classic

ARRIVING DURING THE golden age of first-person shooters, Rare's *GoldenEye 007* stood out from the overcrowded PC scene, landing on Nintendo's doorstep in 1997 on a wave of critical hype and acclaim. Until this point, many dismissed console platforms as unsuited to first-person shooters, instead sitting behind their PCs engrossed in *Doom*, *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. *GoldenEye* arrived with an appropriate bang, highlighting consoles as a viable FPS platform for the first time and contributing significantly to the Nintendo 64's appeal.

With Martin Hollis in the director's chair, the game was moulded by the same prolific collective that would be responsible for *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* further down the line. Rare was hitting heights that many developers would only dream of, and generated some of the best output of the Nineties. Members of the same team would later form Free Radical, responsible for the equally excellent *TimeSplitters* series.

From the more sedate beginnings of the Dam level right through to the dramatic conclusion atop a large satellite array, *GoldenEye* took you on a monumental journey, fighting your way through Soviet control centres, the streets of St Petersburg, the jungles of Cuba and what looks strangely like a reclamation site. The world that Rare built was a potent influence on first-person shooters that followed, and represented the first mainstream FPS with a truly international feel.

THE FILM, RELEASED two years earlier, obviously influenced the game's design. Hollis and his team – thanks to the 64-bit power of Nintendo's machine – managed to achieve high levels of fidelity compared to the bog-standard output of the big movie licensing boom of the Eighties. Never before had there been a licensed game based on a movie that looked so much like its counterpart, and there haven't been many since then that have been as successful creatively or mechanically. Rare had access to set plans while developing, and due to this you can enjoy direct parallels with the film. It is still a joy to this day to jump from the dam at the end of the first level, for example – If you know the film, you'll be aware that it begins with Bond running and then performing the iconic bungie jump. In the game, however, there is an entire Russian compound that must be infiltrated

FOR ENGLAND, JAMES | GOLDENEYE OFFERED A DEEPER EXPERIENCE THAN MANY OF ITS PC COMPETITORS WITH THESE ELEMENTS



IMAGINATION

★ Martin Hollis and his team used the movie as a strong basis for the action in the game, but were unafraid to extend and adapt certain sections to enhance the experience. From being able to drop down into the bathroom in Facility to fighting Jaws in an Aztec temple, *GoldenEye* offers a refreshing take on movie adaptations.



LEVEL DESIGN

★ Ask anyone who played *GoldenEye* back in 1997 where the hidden body armour is in Cradle or where the RC-P90 is in Train, and they'll be able to tell you in a heartbeat. Rare's levels are diverse and memorable, borrowing directly from the film and expanding neatly on locations that the film brushed over.



WEAPONRY

★ Even now in the midst of the largest FPS movement in history thanks to *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, *GoldenEye*'s array of weapons still stands out. This is no more apparent than when the 'All Guns' cheat is enabled, which not only provides you with every variety of firearm available naturally, but extras like a nifty taser.

before then. It almost gives the sense that the film begins in medias res – that by playing the game you're actually seeing the whole picture.

This is true with later levels too, thrusting Bond (impressively rendered to resemble Pierce Brosnan) into scenarios that were either only touched upon in the movie or entirely built for purpose. There are encounters in the Severnaya computer complex that Bond never visits in the movie, instead watching the facility be destroyed by an EMP blast from the GoldenEye satellite. And after protecting Natalya in Trevelyan's control centre towards the end of the game, you pursue the former 006 through some labyrinthine water caverns before eventually encountering him on top of the satellite array, in contrast to the film's simple jaunt in an elevator.

This willingness to adapt culminates in two secret levels that can be accessed after you've completed the game on Secret Agent and 00 Agent difficulties respectively. These levels – Aztec and Temple – showed a wider knowledge of James Bond, pitting Bond against two old nemeses in the form of Jaws and Baron Samedi. The Golden Gun makes an appearance. The temple is based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Aztec is actually Hugo Drax's jungle base from *Moonraker*. It shows a true love for Bond that few games have ever managed, allowing the more fantastical and tongue-in-cheek elements of the franchise to creep in from time to time.

NEVER BEFORE HAD THERE BEEN A LICENSED GAME THAT LOOKED SO MUCH LIKE ITS COUNTERPART

KEY FACTS

■ *GoldenEye* was intitially intended to be an on-rails shooter in the same vein as *Virtua Cop* and *Time Crisis*, but thankfully this was reconsidered.

■ Several levels were designed with the film sets in mind. The best examples of these can be found at the end of the Dam level, the bathroom and bottling room in Facility, the interrogation and library areas of Archives, and the Cradle level where you fight Trevelyan.

■ It is actually possible to control the game using two controllers at once, allowing for first-person control similar to that which you would find nowadays.

■■■ BY ADDING NON-linear objectives, Rare further broke the first-person shooter mould, tasking you with approaching levels in a more considered manner on higher difficulties. On Agent difficulty these objectives are fairly basic, but on Secret Agent and 00 Agent it became quite testing. What's interesting is the lack of hand holding – certain objectives are either hidden away or more technical in nature, requiring a higher level of care than *GoldenEye*'s FPS forbears.

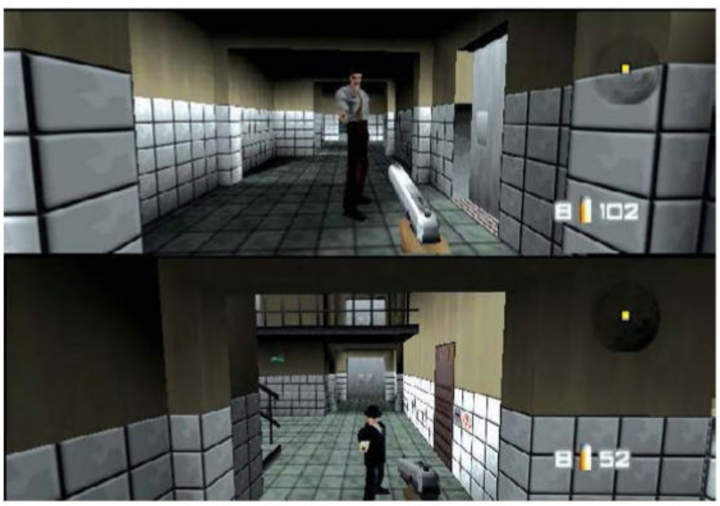
It all purveys production values that weren't really found in first-person shooters at this time, and that's where you can easily connect the dots between *GoldenEye* and modern shooters like *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*. Protecting Natalya in the control room, pursuing Trevelyan in the Cradle level, rescuing hostages on board the frigate – these elements were unexpected from a licensed game in 1997, and are common tropes of the genre today.

But *GoldenEye*'s legacy isn't just found in contemporary first-person shooters; it represents an industry shift. Would we have such a huge FPS player base today if it wasn't for Rare's masterpiece? Probably, yes, but it's likely that it would have taken longer to catch on. It also represents the pinnacle of movie licensing. *GoldenEye* is still prevalent in the hearts and minds of many players today, and for that it is worthy of respect, reassessment and, of course, a playthrough if you get the chance.

GAME CHANGERS

GET AHEAD IN MULTIPLAYER

WE MAY BE AROUND 17 YEARS TOO LATE TO THE PARTY, BUT REGARDLESS, **GAMES™** IS ON HAND TO GUIDE YOU TO CERTAIN VICTORY IN GOLDENEYE MULTIPLAYER MODE



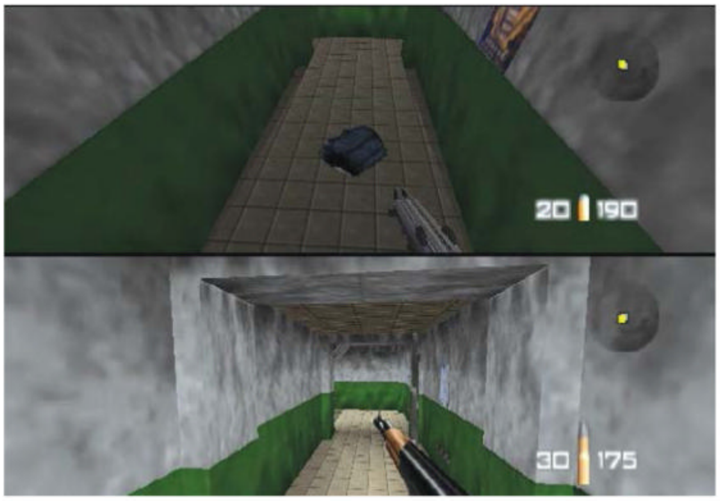
CHARACTER SELECT

THE FIRST STEP on the path to multiplayer success is carefully picking your character. It is worth noting that in some circles, selecting Oddjob is considered to be foul play, Auric Goldfinger's deadly yet diminutive henchman standing considerably shorter than other selectable characters. It's highly recommended that you avoid Jaws – as the tallest, and wearing a highly visible white shirt, he is easy to spot and hit. Try and pick a character that's a little more nondescript, such as Trevelyan, who stands at an average height and whose black clothing blends in nicely with the darker backdrops of some of the maps such as Temple and Caves.



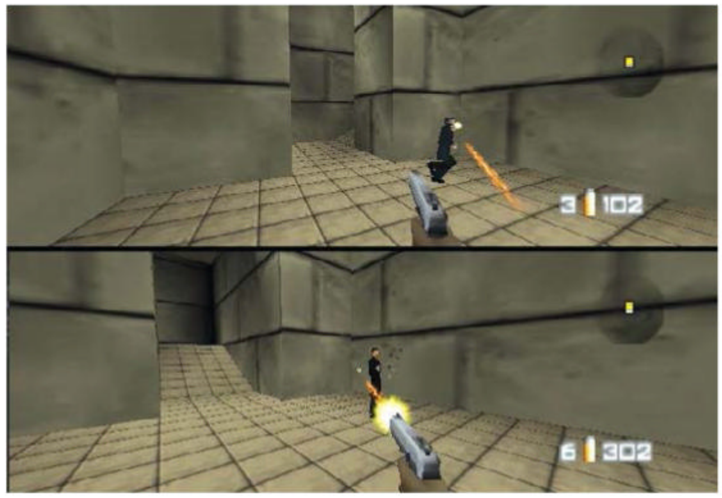
LEARN YOUR MAPS

MUCH LIKE ANY modern first-person shooter, learning *GoldenEye*'s map layouts is essential if you want to embarrass your friends at multiplayer. As well as getting to grips with the basic layouts, it's also worth noting where secret passages and hidey-holes are. Several of these secret pathways are key to success, such as the vents that can be walked through in Complex and the sliding walls that appear in Temple, Library, Basement and Archives. These are all useful for the stealthier player, but if you fancy being offensive-minded and fighting from a cover-based position, then get yourself up on the raised platforms in Complex.



ARMOUR UP

■ IT'S WORTH NOTING that body armour can be found on each of the maps, and finding it and occupying areas near it are surefire ways to get ahead. Refer to step two – body armour is usually located in hidden areas, and so try to be experimental as you traverse the maps. Body armour essentially doubles your health, and in a one-on-one firefight it can be the decider.



THE GOLDENEYE STRAFE

■ NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE power of the strafe. As far as techniques go this is imperative by holding the C-Left and C-Right buttons you can strafe with ease, making it much harder for your opponents to hit you. Try and be unpredictable; walking in a straight line is a very modern concept – get crazy with strafing and watch the bullets whizz harmlessly past you.

BE DISHONEST

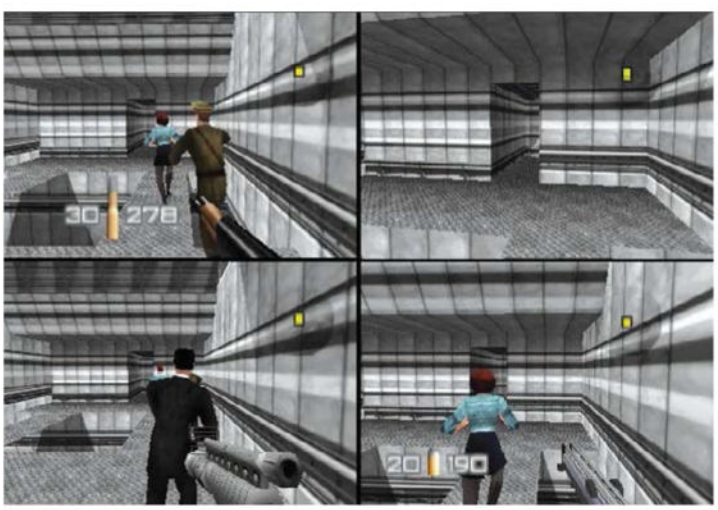
■ WHEN ALL ELSE fails, just cheat. You're playing with friends after all – it's quite likely that they'll forgive you. To do this effectively, select Oddjob quickly and start the game before your opponents know what's happening. Alternatively, beat the game to unlock extra characters in advance, allowing you to select the Moonraker Elite – she is as short as Oddjob, and with a non-specific name, is easier to get away with.

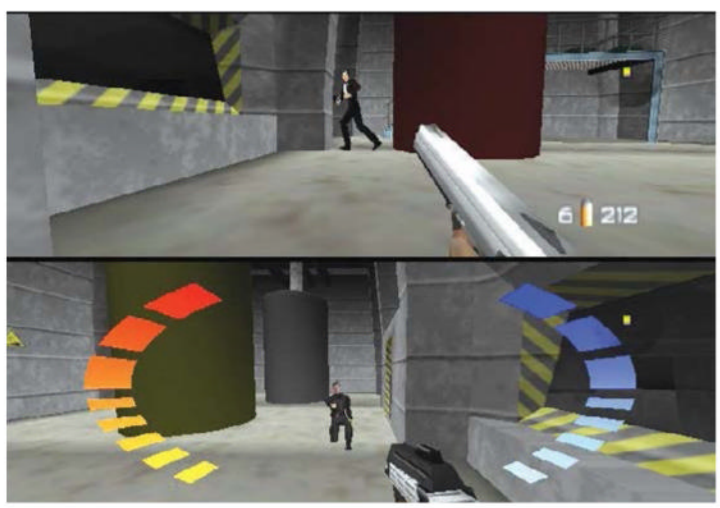
The key technique for robbing a win with any character, though, can be easily achieved once in the game. Hold down R to aim and then rock back with C-Down to crouch. From this position, it is near impossible for other players to hit you without using the cumbersome aim button or crouching themselves. Get down low, find the best weapon you can and then unleash Hell.

Caught out doing both of the above? Don't worry; your greatest weapon is sight. Why waste your time looking at your own portion of the screen? Instead, you should be looking at every screen other than your own. No radar? No problem. If you've learned the maps well enough, a quick glance at an opponent's screen will enable you to ascertain their position and move in for the kill.



■ Above: Shorter characters always had the upper hands in a game of *GoldenEye*. With vertical aiming a concept that was relatively uncommon at the time, characters like Oddjob or Moonraker Elite were a fast track to success. Below: By much the same standard, crouching with a standard character was also a great way of frustrating your opponent.







THE RETRO GUIDE TO... Resident Evil©

Resident Evil is arguably one of Capcom's biggest franchises, establishing survival horror as a legitimate genre by combining thrilling scares with tense action

WHILE CAPCOM'S SUPERB game didn't really create the survival horror genre, despite arguments made by those who love the series, it's arguably responsible for creating many of the tropes that gamers associate with it. The franchise itself has gone through some interesting twists and turns since it was first created in 1996 and has gone on to become one of Capcom's most successful franchises, selling over 60 million units. With the recent release of *Resident Evil HD* and the incoming episodic release of *Revelations 2* we felt it was the perfect time to revisit the popular series. Prepare to enter survival horror…

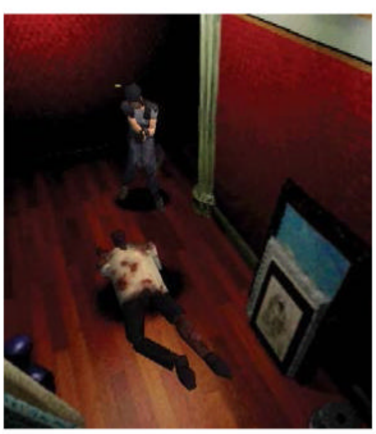


RESIDENT EVIL 1996

VARIOUS

Capcom's *Resident Evil* not only introduced some of the franchise's most memorable characters – Chris Redfield, Jill Valentine and Albert Wesker – but also cemented many of the mechanics that would become integral to the series for years to come. Tank-like controls, hilariously silly dialogue, careful item management, limited resources, A-to-B puzzles and tense pacing all combined to deliver a satisfyingly mature game that really helped Sony's console stand apart from the crowd.

The pre-rendered visuals created a creepily atmospheric vibe that made exploring the Spencer mansion a terrifying experience. It's an expertly crafted game from Shinji Mikami, who had previously cut his teeth on various child friendly fare including *Aladdin* and *Goof Troop*. *Resident Evil* (or *Biohazard* as it was known in Japan) arguably saw the up-and-coming director grow up and the genre grew up right beside him.



RESIDENT EVIL: DIRECTOR'S CUT 1997

PLAYSTATION

There are actually two versions of *Director's Cut* – one that supports DualShock and one that doesn't. The game itself is a solid update of the original featuring a new Beginner's mode, as well as an Arranged version, which featured a new location for key items, new clothes for each character and a much more powerful gun.





RESIDENT EVIL 2 1998

VARIOUS

It's telling that the two best *Resident Evil* games both feature Leon S Kennedy. Set two months after the events of the first game, Capcom's sequel further establishes the convoluted plot that the series would become famous for, but greatly ramps up virtually every aspect of the game. The locations are larger, with the vast majority of the game taking place in Raccoon City's police station, while the visuals are greatly improved, matched by a simply stunning soundtrack.

Resident Evil 2 focuses on two characters, Leon S Kennedy and Claire Redfield and is spread across two discs. Interestingly, while both scenarios are often set in the same locations, their puzzles and storylines change dramatically, greatly adding to the filmic atmosphere that director Hideki Kamiya wanted to create. *Resident Evil 2* also introduced support characters, including the infamous Ada Wong, who appear at certain points of the adventure and are occasionally playable. It's also memorable for being the first game in the series to give you visual clues to your character's current health status: handy, as it's not an easy game. Interestingly, Capcom's sequel started off as a completely different game, which was scrapped a good way into its development when producer Shinji Mikami decided it was too boring.

RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS 1999

VARIOUS

Some consider *Nemesis* to be something of a back step for the series, but it introduced many key mechanics, most notably the incredibly useful 180-degree turn and a handy dodge attack. Both new moves are particularly useful as you'll need as much agility as you can muster in order to deflect the continual assaults of the *Nemesis* of the title, a huge bio-mechanically created creature that comes equipped with a rocket launcher, absorbs bullets like a cheap sponge and continually chases Jill Valentine (the only selectable character) during key points of the game.

Yes it's more linear than the previous games, but the assaults of *Nemesis*, the ability to craft ammunition and being able to use oil drums to create explosive damage to nearby enemies makes the game far more action-packed as a result. Oh, and it introduces the mini-game 'The Mercenaries – Operation: Mad Jackal'.







RESIDENT EVIL SURVIVOR 2000

PLAYSTATION

Survivor was Capcom's first spin-off from the main games and it's not a good one. Unlike previous titles it's essentially a lightgun game, but one where you have free movement. Things get slightly easier when using a lightgun, but it remains a fiddly experience due to the clunky controls. It's a pity the gameplay is so laborious, as *Survivor* actually makes a good attempt at transferring the *Resi* universe into a first-person world. Interestingly, the US version of the game lacks lightgun support, meaning you'll have to rely on the piggish joypad controls.





RESIDENT EVIL: CODE: VERONICA 2000

DREAMCAST

Code: Veronica never seems to get the love it deserves, possibly because it was the first *Resi* game to not originally appear on a Sony console. It's the first game in the series to use 3D backgrounds and a movable camera and occasionally switches to first-person when using certain weapons. While mechanically it's very much business as usual, the ability to pick up and use herbs when your inventory is full does make a huge difference, particularly as *Code: Veronica* is quite a tough *Resident Evil* game. Like *Resident Evil 2* it takes place across numerous locations and features extras once the game is completed. In this case it's the rather enjoyable Battle Game, which feels like an early precursor to the excellent Mercenaries mode of *Resident Evil 4*.





RESIDENT EVIL: CODE: VERONICA X 2000

VARIOUS

Despite the controversy of *Code: Veronica*'s Dreamcast release, it wasn't long before the PS2 got its own version. It's largely the same game, with slightly improved visuals and additional cutscenes that focus on the increasing popularity of Albert Wesker. It also features an additional DVD called 'Wesker's Report', which delves deeper into the shady character. It received a HD re-release in 2011.

RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN 2001

GAME BOY COLOR

Gaiden was predominantly created by British developer M2, making it the first title in the series to be created outside Japan. It's also nowhere near as bad as reports suggest, thanks to a huge tanker to explore, Barry Burton getting some much needed limelight as one of the main characters, and a slick combat system that switches to first-person whenever the player engages zombies. Yes it was never going to capture the atmosphere of the PlayStation original, but *Gaiden* remains a resoundingly solid adventure game.



RESIDENT EVIL SURVIVOR 2 CODE: VERONICA 2001

VARIOUS

The second *Survivor* game is a notable improvement, but still lacks the sheer visceral thrills of Sega's *House Of The Dead* series. Based on *Code: Veronica*, players control Claire Redfield or Steve Burnside and can use both lightguns and joypads. In addition to featuring two unique modes: Dungeon and Arcade, *Survivor 2* also introduces partner assistance, in the form of a computer-controlled player that will lay down cover fire for you. There's also a timer that introduces the Nemesis from *Resident Evil 3* if players dawdle for too long.



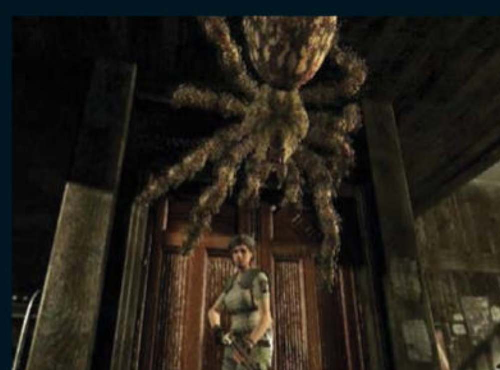


RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE 2002

GAMECUBE

When Capcom revealed that its next brace of *Resident Evil* games, including *Resident Evil 4*, would be exclusive to the GameCube there was uproar. Capcom saved face, however, with this astonishing update of the original game that remains one of the best remakes of recent times. In addition to astonishing visuals, *Resident Evil* on GameCube is retrofitted with many of the later Resi mechanics, including the 180-degree turn and the ability to judge a character's health based on its onscreen actions.

It includes several new areas that were cut from the original game, equips Jill and Chris with handy defensive weapons and introduces the dreaded Crimson Head Zombies – extremely fast and dangerous foes that replace those zombies that weren't fully destroyed by the player on their first encounter. It was re-released on Wii in 2009, but adds very little over the original GameCube release.





RESIDENT EVIL ZERO 2002

GAMECUBE

Many don't like *Zero*, possibly because it has a far more insectoid theme than previous games, with zombies taking a noticeable backseat to giant scorpions, giant centipedes and other creepy crawlies. By far the best feature of *Zero* is its excellent Partner Zapping mechanic that lets the player switch between both characters at will. Rebecca Chambers is versatile but weak, while prisoner Billy Coen is built like a tank and can use a lighter and push heavy objects. Both characters' abilities must be combined together to complete the many puzzles thrown at you, making it a unique addition to the series. Originally planned for the N64's ill-fated 64DD, it was switched to the N64, before eventually resurfacing on the Cube. A lazy Wii port showed up in 2008.



RESIDENT EVIL: DEAD AIM 2003

PLAYSTATION 2

The last game in the *Survivor* series is easily the best, but it still falls massively short of the quality found in the main series. It's the first game in the series to combine both first-person and third-person views, but is still hampered by the same grid-based control system that made the earlier games such a pain to control. It certainly looks pretty, with impressive visuals and the ability to move and shoot makes it stand apart from many of the other games in the series, but it's still a bland mishmash of genres.

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK 2003

PLAYSTATION 2

Plans for *Outbreak* had circled around the Capcom offices for a good five years before the game became a reality. It's an interesting addition to the series, featuring online play, a large number of characters (eight, in fact) and five unique scenarios to fight through. Sadly, the ability to play with three other players was completely stripped from the PAL version of the game, making for a horrendously frustrating experience, as you often find yourself ill-equipped to deal with the large number of zombies the game throws at you. Mechanically it's exactly what you'd expect from a *Resident Evil* game, but the pacing, carefully placed scares and strong boss encounters are nowhere to be seen.





RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK FILE 2 2004

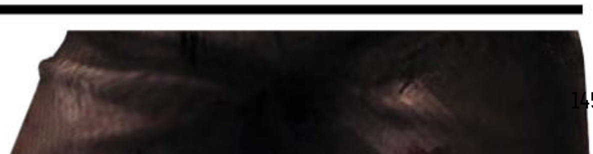
PLAYSTATION 2

Outbreak's sequel is awesome because it features zombie elephants. Okay, so it's not incredible, but it's a far better structured game than *Outbreak* thanks to better balance, more interesting scenarios and numerous little tweaks to the gameplay. The original eight characters return and this time PAL users got to experience full online play. Despite both games having their servers pulled by Capcom, fans have kept the Japanese versions going on private servers.





"WHEN CAPCOM REVEALED THAT ITS NEXT BRACE OF RESIDENT EVIL GAMES WOULD BE EXCLUSIVE TO THE GAMECUBE, THERE WAS UPROAR"





RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005

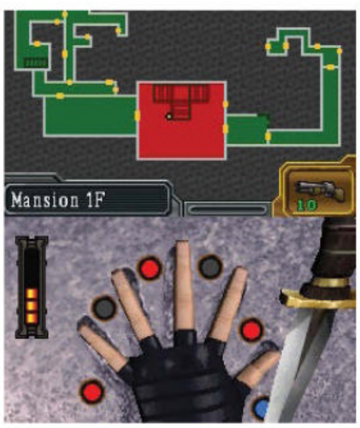
VARIOUS

Shinji Mikami's sequel is quite possibly one of the most important games of the last ten years. In addition to breathing fresh life into the series, it reinvented action games and the third-person shooter, influencing the likes of *Gears Of War* and *Dead Space*.

Mikami essentially redesigned *Resident Evil 4* several times before he settled on the cocktail of action and horror that appears in the final game. Moving the camera closer to Leon pulls you into the on-screen action, while the ability to specifically shot out body parts makes managing the large crowd of enemies you face far tenser. Context-sensitive buttons allow Leon to pull off an impressive number of moves, from roundhousing enemies to kicking down ladders and stabbing the necks of giants, while the new inventory system kept the tedious item management of earlier games to a bare minimum.

Resident Evil 4's set pieces are still some of the best around, while its dynamic pacing, sheer variety and tense shepherding of Ashley (who Leon has been sent to rescue) make it stand apart from its many peers. It's arguably more action than horror, but it was just what the series and the genre needed. And it still managed to pull off a series of incredibly gruesome scenes, proving that while Mikami was content to take the series in an exciting new direction, he hadn't forgotten what had made it so popular in the first place. While HD versions of the game do exist, we'd argue that the enhanced Wii port is the definitive version to own.





RESIDENT EVIL: DEADLY SILENCE 2006

NINTENDO DS

Capcom celebrated *Resident Evil*'s 10th anniversary by remaking the game for Nintendo's dual-screened portable. In addition to including the original game it also features Rebirth mode, which introduces plenty of clever touch-based additions that greatly adds to the overall gameplay. Zombie slashing, CPR (by blowing into the mic) and shaking off enemies all adds to the atmosphere, while the smaller screen also enhances the creepy vibes of the classic game. Rebirth also includes a couple of mini-games for up to four players that adds further meat to what is essentially yet another remake of the PlayStation original.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES 2007

WII





This was the logical evolution of the *Gun Survivor* series and it works incredibly well. *The Umbrella Chronicles* is a rather enjoyable on-rails shooter that focuses on the events found in the first three games and *Resident Evil Zero*. It's possible to look around the playing area with the Nunchuk, but you're effectively mowing down classic enemies as they continually assault you. There are a large number of levels to unlock and plenty of alternate routes, ensuring that *The Umbrella Chronicles* has plenty of replay value. A HD version for the PlayStation 3 was released in 2012.





RESIDENT EVIL 5 2009

VARIOUS

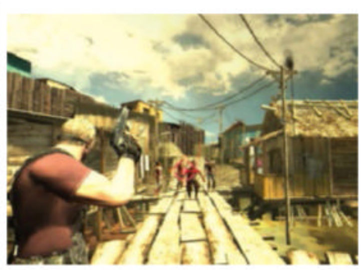
The first *Resident Evil* game for the then next-gen consoles was a long time coming and quite controversial, due to all the racism claims that surrounded it upon release. What's interesting about *Resident Evil 5* is that it's essentially two different games depending on how you play through it. Play on your own and Capcom's game becomes amazingly frustrating because newcomer Sheva is utterly useless as a supporting character. She constantly stumbles into trouble, easily gets herself surrounded by enemies and rarely gives you help when it's needed.

Play with a second player, however, and the game transforms dramatically. It lacks the well-structured pace of *4* of course, and the less said about the lousy cover system the better, but it otherwise becomes a lot of fun. There's something immensely satisfying about exploring the African setting with a friend, while the online version of *Mercenaries* is arguably the best version of the mini-game yet. There's a definite move towards all-out action compared to *4* – it's as action-packed as Chris's biceps are huge – and the final boss is a disappointment, but it's a solid addition to the series.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE DARKSIDE CHRONICLES 2009

WII

Capcom's second Wii shooter is business as usual, although it offers an improved story and enhanced visuals. It chooses to focus on *Resident Evil 2* and *Code: Veronica*, but it's more character-orientated than *The Umbrella Chronicles*. A HD version was released on PS3 in 2012.





RESIDENT EVIL 5: GOLD EDITION 2010

VARIOUS



Capcom released several pieces of DLC for *Resident Evil 5*, including Versus, an online multiplayer mode, various costumes for Mercenaries and two standalone story-based adventures, Lost In Nightmares and Desperate Escape. *Gold Edition* combined all this together, while also including Mercenaries Reunion and PlayStation Move support for the PS3 version.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE MERCENARIES 3D 2011

NINTENDO 3DS

Don't buy a second-hand version as it's impossible to wipe saves. While the 3D isn't the best, *Mercenaries* proves to be a solid score attack game, even if it brings little new to previous Mercenaries games. Despite this it's a fun score attack game with plenty of memorable locations, a host of recognisable characters (although Leon S Kennedy is nowhere to be seen) and a small selection of brutally tough bosses. The maps are well designed while the graphics really show off the power of Nintendo's handheld system.







RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS 2011

NINTENDO 3DS

Revelations was one of the first 3DS games to utilise the Circle Pad Pro add-on. While it makes a good attempt at recapturing the early horror of the PlayStation games, it feels quite budget in places, particularly when the player is continually facing the same few enemy skins.

Like the later *Resident Evil 6*, *Revelations*' main campaign is split between several groups of characters and takes in various locations, from a deserted ship in the Mediterranean to an airstrip in the mountains. It allows the player to move and shoot, but also introduces *Metroid Prime*-style scanning and the ability to switch between three weapons. The dodge move of earlier games returns, while StreetPass support is also included. *Revelations* also introduces "Raid Mode", an excellent new game mode that sees you battling through arranged versions of earlier scenarios.

A HD version was released in 2013 for PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U and PC. While it added various bits of new content, it also highlighted the budget-like roots of the 3DS original.



AN INTERVIEW WITH YOSHIAKI HIRABAYASHI

Capcom's producer looks back at the Resident Evil series

How many *Resident Evil* games have you been involved in now?

I've worked on five titles – *Resident Evil 4-6*, *Resident Evil Zero*, and the GameCube version of *Resident Evil*.

What is it that drew you to the series?

I studied computer graphics at college, and was invited by Capcom to try interviewing for a job there, so it was really something that I got into initially due to the situation at Capcom when I joined. That was the team I entered and I've been involved with the series ever since.

What do you find most satisfying about creating *Resident Evil* games?

Creating the games is such a long process. With that in mind, seeing players enjoy the games after they come out is the most satisfying and rewarding part of the job, and that goes for any game, not just *Resident Evil*.

Why do you think *Resident Evil* remains so popular?

I think that the games remain popular because they are enjoyable – not just as survival horror games, but also through the story, characters and other aspects.

What do you feel *Resident Evil HD* will bring to the series now?

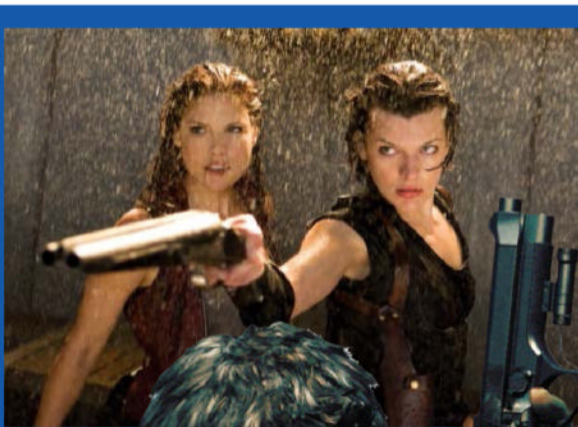
I think it's a great chance for players to experience the original *Resident Evil* title, which is acclaimed by many as a masterpiece, in amazing HD quality.

Which of the Resident Evil series is your favourite game and why?

The GameCube version of *Resident Evil* – not just because it was my first project, but also because I think it was a very well-rounded game and a great survival horror title.

Who is your favourite *Resident Evil* character?

It's difficult to choose just one, but I would say Ada. Her mysterious presence in the stories adds a certain extra something to the *Resident Evil* series.



RESI ON THE SILVER SCREEN

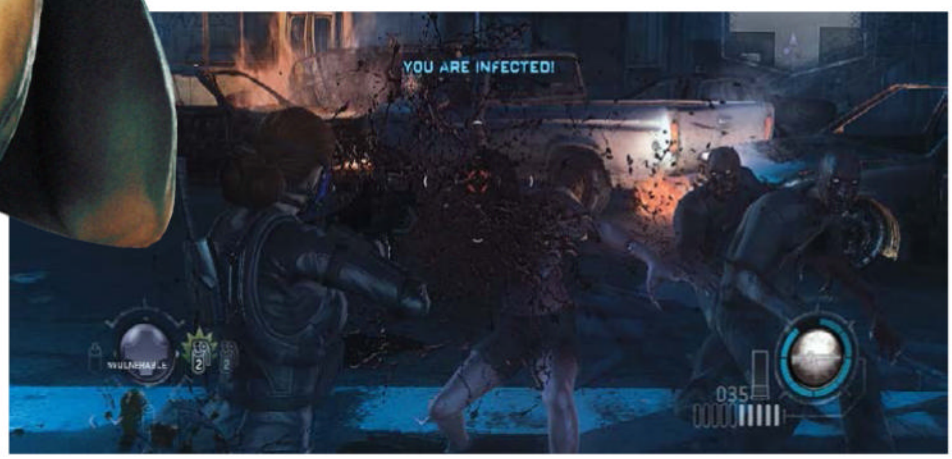
Capcom's *Resident Evil* series is easily the most successful videogame licence to appear on the big screen. While the quality of the films ranges from okay to "god, my eyes, my eyes" they're all performed well at the box office. Paul W S Anderson has been involved in all five live-action films and is currently working on *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*. Anderson's wife, Milla Jovovich is the star of all six films and plays Alice, a character created specifically for the films. Despite their critical disdain, the series has generated over $915 million. Capcom has also released three anime-based movies. The short film *Biohazard 4D-Executer* was released in 2000, *Resident Evil: Degeneration* focused on Leon S Kennedy and Claire Redfield and was released in 2008, while *Resident Evil Damnation* was released in 2012 and follows Leon and Ada Wong. The animated films are set in the same universe as the actual games.



RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY 2012

VARIOUS

Conceptually, *Operation Raccoon City* is a great idea, expanding on the online mechanics first hinted at in *Outbreak*. Unfortunately, the game itself is something of a mess due to atrociously bad AI, glitch visuals and boring set pieces. Despite its overall shoddiness, gamers loved the idea of a *SOCOM*-styled squad-based shooter and it went on to sell over 2 million units.







RESIDENT EVIL 6 2012

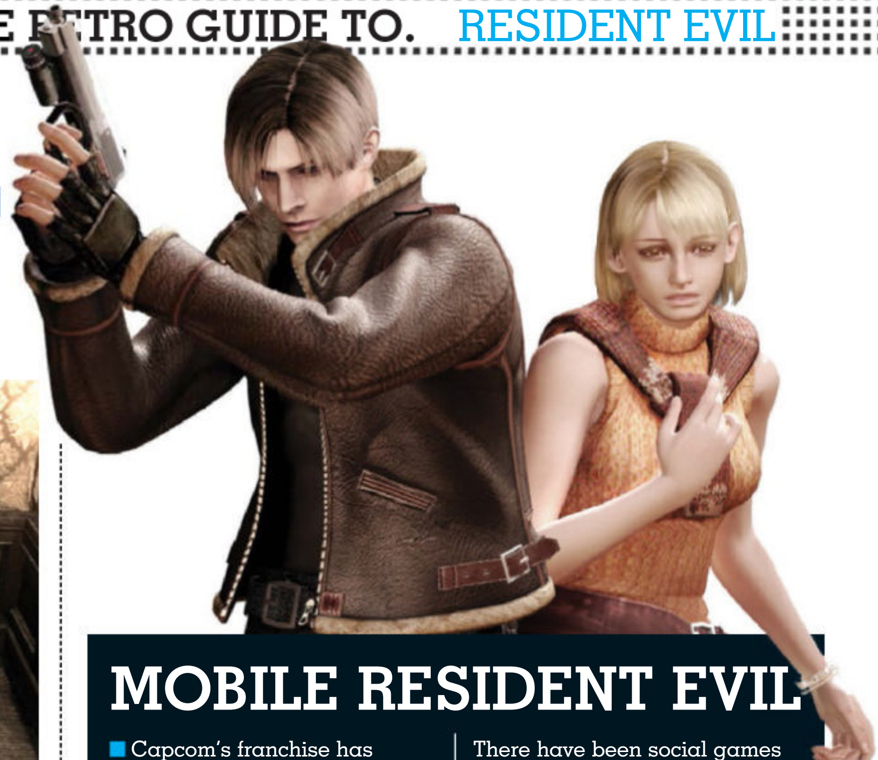
VARIOUS

Spread across four large scenarios and featuring an extremely lengthy campaign mode, *Resident Evil 6* is a bizarre, bloated triple-A game that tries far too hard. There are plenty of great action sequences to be found and the combat is arguably the best in the series, but there's way too much filler, which massively cuts down its enjoyment. Like *Resident Evil 5*, it works far better with a second player, as the computer AI is prone to hinder you as much as it helps. Each scenario is based around a specific character: Leon S Kennedy, Chris Redfield, Jake Muller and Ada Wong and varies greatly in its style and pacing, with Leon's being the most accurate to previous games. While the main game divided critics, it still managed to sell over 5 million copies, meaning it's only a matter of time before *Resident Evil 7* is officially announced.

RESIDENT EVIL HD 2015

VARIOUS

While it's essentially a HD update of the GameCube game, a number of new features make it worthy of inclusion here. The new widescreen mode does a great job of showing off the original's spectacular graphics, while the free movement, makes the game far more enjoyable to play (and quite a bit easier as a result).





"THERE ARE PLENTY OF GREAT ACTION SEQUENCES TO BE FOUND AND THE COMBAT IS ARGUABLY THE BEST IN THE SERIES"



RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS 2 2015

VARIOUS

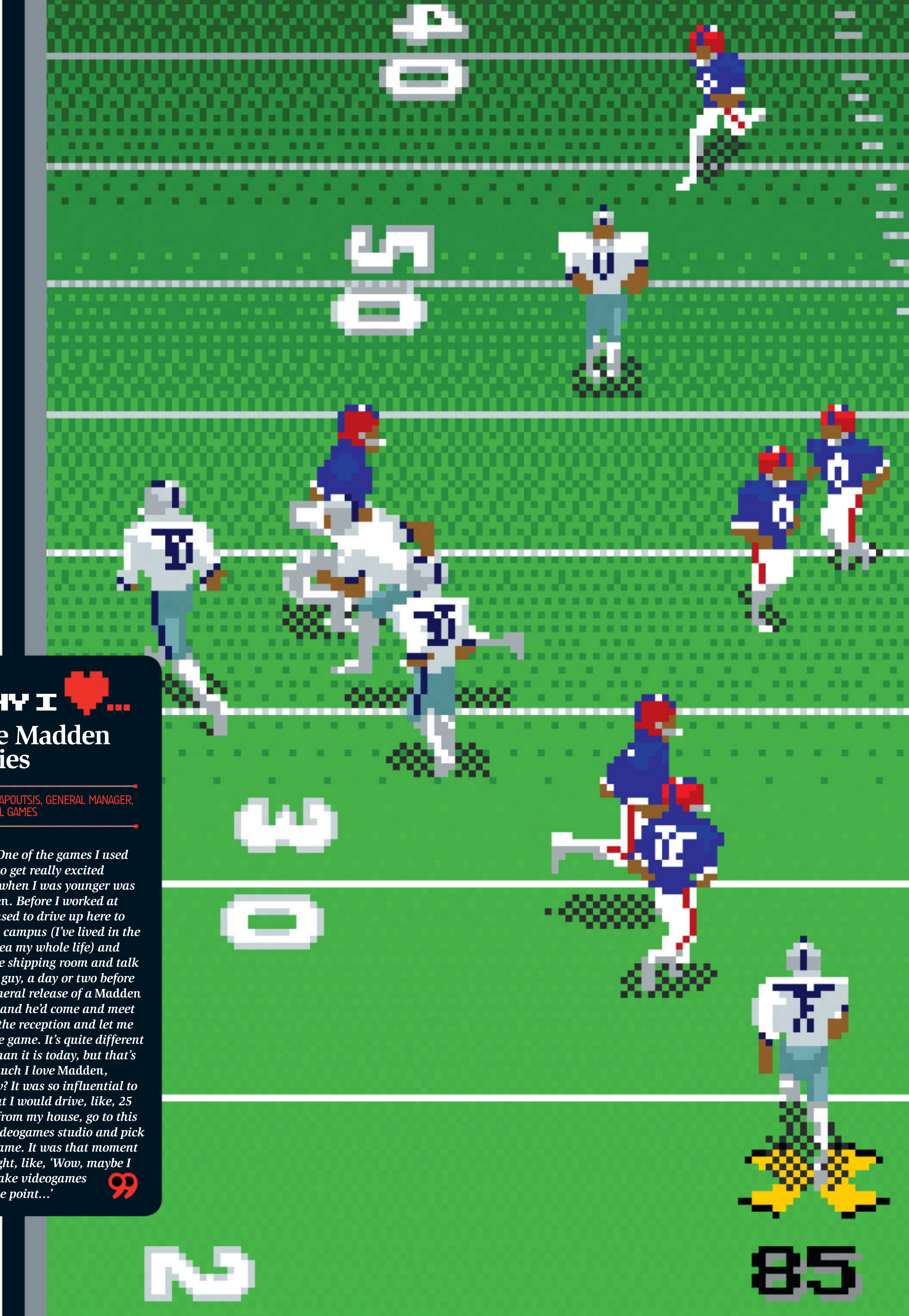
While *Revelations 2* is still under wraps we do know a few things about it. Barry Burton returns as a playable character, it will support co-operative gameplay and will be in episodic form, spread across four parts and introduces Barry's daughter, Moira. Here's hoping it can capture the atmosphere of the earlier games and not repeat the overblown pyrotechnics of *Resident Evil 6*.

MOBILE RESIDENT EVIL

Capcom's franchise has appeared on various mobiles with varying degrees of success. First up was *Resident Evil: The Missions*, which was released in 2003. *Confidential Report* followed in 2005 and was a turn-based strategy game – a first for the series. *Genesis* was a puzzle game that appeared in 2008 and received a sequel, *Uprising*, a couple of years later. There have been social games in the form of 2011's *Outbreak Survive*, and shooters in the form of *Assault The Nightmare* and *Zombie Buster*. The most successful offerings have been on iOS however, and include cut-down versions of *Resident Evil 4* and *Mercenaries*. There's also *Degeneration* and *Afterlife*, which are based on their respective movies.





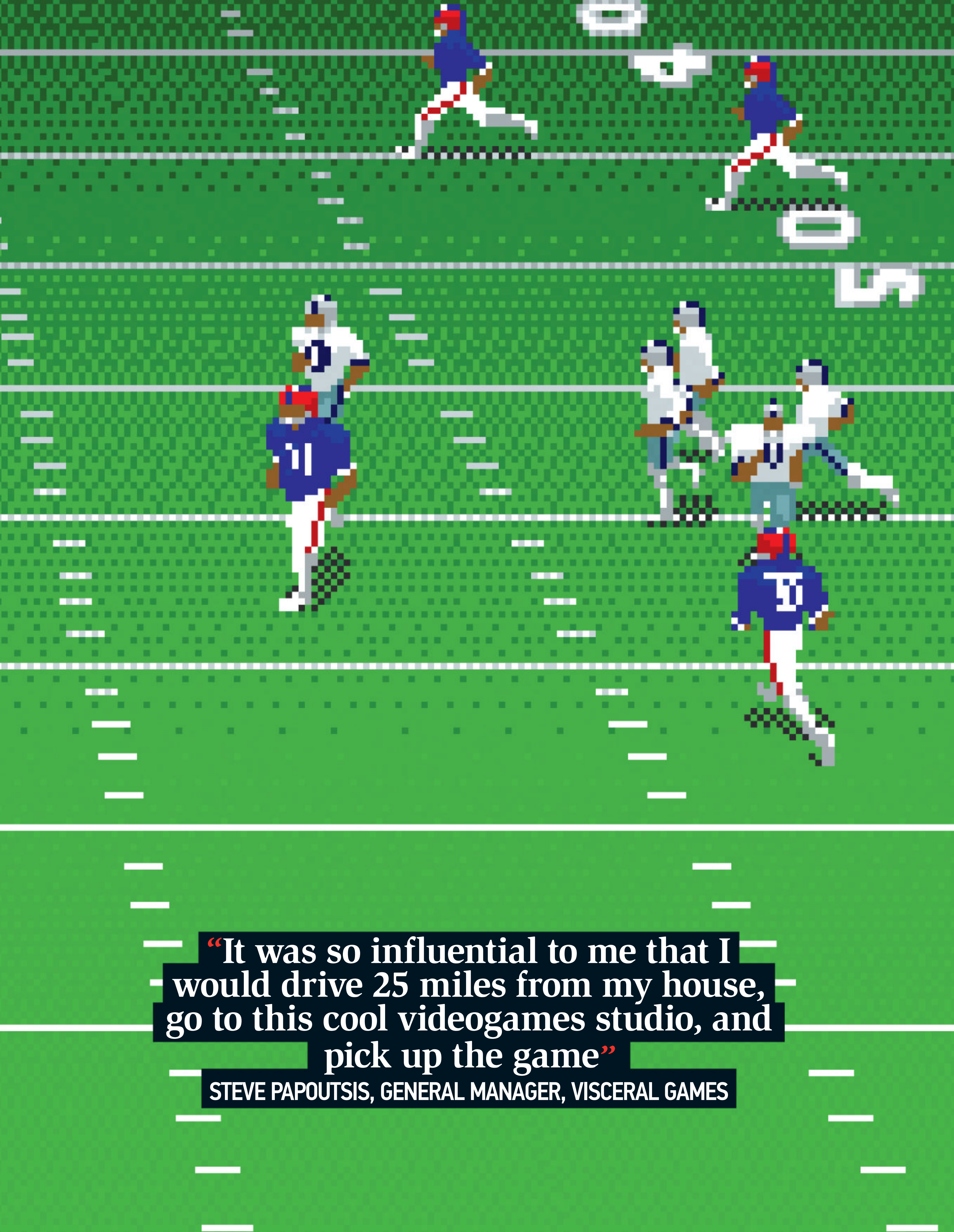


WHY I ♥…

The Madden series

STEVE PAPOUTSIS, GENERAL MANAGER, VISCERAL GAMES

"One of the games I used to get really excited about when I was younger was Madden*. Before I worked at EA, I used to drive up here to the EA campus (I've lived in the Bay area my whole life) and call the shipping room and talk to this guy, a day or two before the general release of a* Madden *game, and he'd come and meet me at the reception and let me buy the game. It's quite different then than it is today, but that's how much I love* Madden*, y'know? It was so influential to me that I would drive, like, 25 miles from my house, go to this cool videogames studio and pick up a game. It was that moment I thought, like, 'Wow, maybe I can make videogames at some point…'"*



> “It was so influential to me that I would drive 25 miles from my house, go to this cool videogames studio, and pick up the game”

STEVE PAPOUTSIS, GENERAL MANAGER, VISCERAL GAMES



BEHIND THE SCENES

GHOSTBUSTERS

This year marks the 30th anniversary of one of the most enduring films from the Eighties, but with the title on the cover page reading games™ rather than films™, we look back at the game that accompanied it



Released: 1984
Format: Commodore 64
Publisher: Activision
Developer: In-house
Key Staff:
Design – David Crane
Additional Programming – Adam Bellin
Graphics Design – Hilary Mills
Sound Design – Russell Lieblich



WHEN IT COMES to iconic family films, few decades have delivered more entertainment value than the Eighties. Everything from the perilous escapades of Indiana Jones in *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and the DeLorean delights of *Back to the Future* to Spielberg's timeless *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* and *that* dance from *The Goonies*. All of these films received videogame adaptations – one of them to the detriment of the whole industry – but even though most of these games amounted to little more than interesting curios at best and landfill fodder at worst, there was still the odd glimmer of light in a sea of mediocrity.

Released on 7 June 1984, the original *Ghostbusters* film is as much a part of Eighties culture as *The A-Team*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Smiths*. Its refreshing mix of comedy and supernatural shenanigans set it apart from the other summer blockbusters that debuted around the same time and it soon spawned everything from comic books to theme park attractions. But before Bill Murray's quips and Ray Parker Jr's theme made it on to the silver screen, a deal was struck between Columbia Pictures and Activision to make a *Ghostbusters* game that would launch alongside the film.

The man who would make this *Ghostbusters* game a reality was none other than David Crane, the creator of *Pitfall!* and one of the co-founders of Activision alongside Alan Miller, Bob Whitehead, Larry Kaplan and Jim Levy. Crane worked at Atari for two years from 1977 to 1979 and was first credited on Outlaw for the Atari 2600, but far from entering the industry as a programming novice, he already had experience in games development. "*Outlaw* was the first videogame I published," Crane reflects. "But I had designed games for years before that – including an unbeatable Tic-Tac-Toe game computer. I was also a pinball wizard and mastered all the early arcade games."

Despite a love for pinball tables and arcade sticks, Crane's primary hobby was tennis. "When I graduated and took a job at National Semiconductor in one of their Silicon Valley chip design divisions, I moved into an apartment complex in Sunnyvale, California that had tennis courts," Crane continues. "One of the other tennis players at that complex was Alan Miller, who was working at Atari. One night after an evening of tennis, Alan showed us an ad he was working on that was to be placed in the newspaper. He asked me and the others to critique the language."

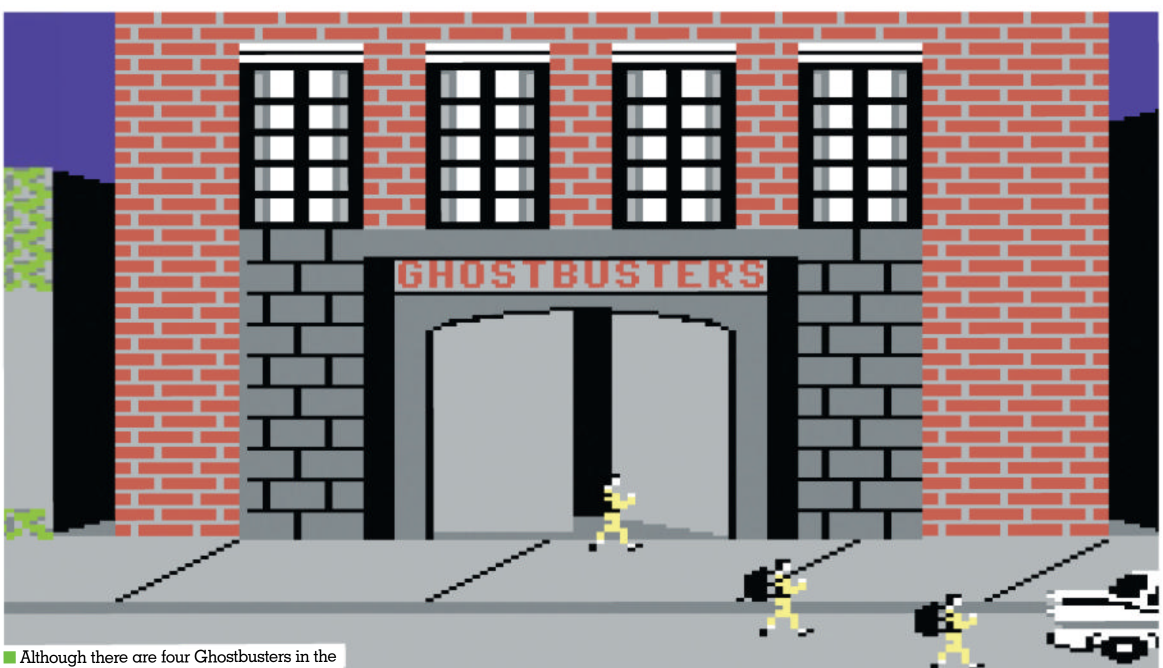
What began as a post-tennis proofread quickly became an opportunity to break into the games industry. "Atari was hiring game designers for the 2600 and the job looked interesting," Crane recalls. "That night I typed up a resumé on a computer that I had built from scratch. I interviewed at 10am the next morning and got a job offer by 2pm. Over the next two years the four game designers who ended up founding Activision grew into a close working unit. When Atari failed to appreciate that the four of us accounted for 60 per cent of their game cartridge sales we left to form Activision."

I INTERVIEWED AT 10AM AND GOT A JOB OFFER BY 2PM

THE RISE AND fall of Atari is something that has been discussed at length in these very pages – particularly by former Retro columnist, Howard Scott Warshaw. But when Crane and company severed ties with Atari to become the industry's first third-party developer, they made sure that designers and programmers got credit for the games they created. This led to the Activision instruction manuals having tip sections where the creator could offer the player advice. *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*, for example, featured some helpful quotes from Crane. These included:



David Crane: he ain't 'fraid of no crippling production deadlines.



Although there are four Ghostbusters in the film, the game only gives you control of three.



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Everything a rookie Ghostbuster needs to trap those pesky ghouls.

COMPACT ($2000)



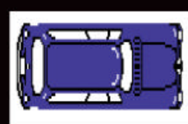
Considering you start the game with $10,000, this VW Beetle is reasonably priced. But with a top speed of 75mph and only room for five items, it may be a case of false economy.



1963 HEARSE ($4800)

What better way to deal with the undead than with this classic coffin courier? It's slightly faster than the Compact, has room for nine items and has the authentic look of the film's iconic vehicle.

STATION WAGON ($6000)



With a top speed of 110mph and the highest loading capacity in the game, *Ghostbusters*' Station Wagon is arguably more practical than the flashier High-Performance for nearly half the price.



HIGH-PERFORMANCE ($15,000)

If you want to afford this pimp-mobile you'll probably have to play through the game more than once. It can only carry seven items but it's no slouch at 160mph and zips through the streets of NYC.

PK ENERGY DETECTOR ($400)



This inexpensive device will keep you informed of the city's PK Energy level. It basically lets you know how much time is left before the Keymaster and Gatekeeper get it on in the centre of the map.



IMAGE INTENSIFIER($800)

Makes the Slimers appear less distorted when they appear. Not essential to getting through the game, but certainly a useful device when it comes to the trade of ghost busting.

MARSHMALLOW SENSOR ($800)



This gadget gives you some warning of when a Marshmallow Man disaster is about to happen. That's something you need to know about as he'll crumple half the city before you can say 'tea cake'.



GHOST BAIT ($400)

This is the only item that can stop the Marshmallow Man from destroying a city block. It has multiple uses and you get $2000 for every successful defence. A nice little earner for the business savvy.

TRAPS ($600)



Without Traps you can't catch ghosts. Simple as that. Ideally, you need to be equipped with at least three so you can stay on the road for longer without having to go back to HQ and restock.



GHOST VACUUM ($500)

As you drive between buildings you can suck up a wandering ghost with this Poltergust 3000 precursor. This slows down the build-up of PK Energy and makes for a fun mini-game in of itself.

PORTABLE LASER CONFINEMENT SYSTEM ($8000)



Better keep a lid on this one! As the second most expensive item available in the game, the PLCS is clearly a luxury. It handily empties all your traps automatically but isn't a necessity.

"don't get discouraged if a bat gets you whenever you go from a ladder to a gold bar."

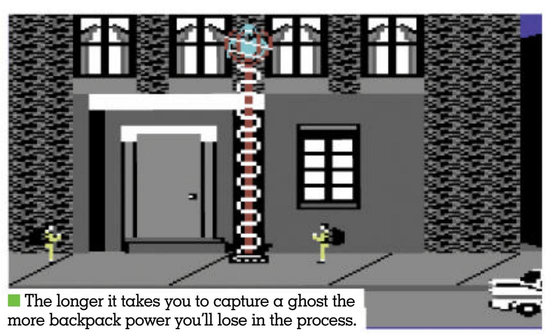
The 1984 *Pitfall* sequel was the last game that Crane worked on before setting his sights on the Commodore 64 and *Ghostbusters*. "There had been some spectacularly failed attempts by other companies to make a videogame with a movie tie-in," Crane confirms with a knowing look. "But the categories were such a good fit that Activision had people reading scripts, hoping to find the right combination. Tom Lopez [former Vice-President of Editorial Development] brought the *Ghostbusters* script into the lab because he thought it was going to be popular. We all read it and agreed."

Seeing merit in the script was no guarantee that the film would be a hit, but regardless of whether it was a flop or not, the pressing concern was the looming release. "A game with a movie-theme has to be on the market while the movie is still hot, which means while it is in theatres," Crane stresses. "That meant making a game with a terribly short development window, which has always been the kiss of death in games. I saw that I could make it happen if I re-tasked game code I had been working on for six months or so, and I accepted the challenge."

That game was an automobile action title that was originally envisaged without proton packs in mind. "*Ghostbusters* would never have happened if not for *Car Wars*," Crane reflects. "In a sense, *Car Wars* gave its life to make *Ghostbusters* possible. It was a game where players equipped their cars with various weapons and then battled head-to-head on the highways. It would've been one of the first action games with an in-game economy. *Car Wars* gave *Ghostbusters* the economy, the car customisation and the driving scene where the player could vacuum up ghosts. New screens included the city map and the ghost capturing screens."

Playing *Ghostbusters* on the Commodore 64 today, it's impressive just how much content Crane managed to piece together in such a short space of time. You begin the game by taking out a loan for your new ghost-busting business, and after stocking up on necessary equipment and one of five vehicles – including the Beetle-like Compact and a 1963 Hearse – you have to keep an eye on the city map for paranormal activity. When one of the city blocks starts flashing, you have to capture the offending ghost by carefully manoeuvring two *Ghostbusters* armed with proton packs before releasing a trap.

If you succeed, you'll earn money that can be spent on better vehicles and improved ghost-busting equipment, but if you activate the trap at the wrong



The longer it takes you to capture a ghost the more backpack power you'll lose in the process.



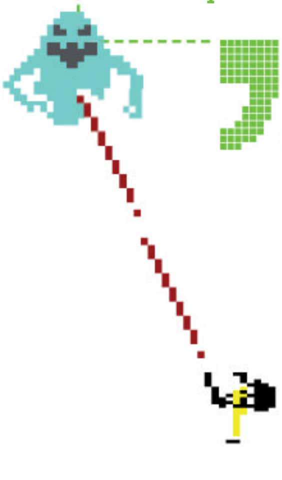
■ The window for dashing between the Marshmallow Man's legs is incredibly tight. Thank God for modern save states!

WHAT THEY SAID...



All you have to do is stop the 100ft Marshmallow Man from getting in the fridge.

Your 64, Issue Six February 1985



time or make the mistake of crossing the streams, you'll get slimed and lose a Ghostbuster for your trouble. You also have to make periodic trips back to Ghostbusters HQ to empty your traps, recharge your batteries and recruit more Ghostbusters. The aim of the game is to earn as much money as you can before the city's PK Energy rating (which rises automatically) reaches its peak of 9999, at which point you have to close Gozer's portal.

One thing that's interesting to note about this tie-in is that it didn't get caught up in the plot. It was more about turning an interesting premise into compelling gameplay. "We had the script, we had some storyboards and we had camera-ready art for logos and such," Crane shares when asked about Columbia Pictures contribution to the *Ghostbusters* game. "We didn't have a licence to the characters' likenesses, so the actors had no stake in what we were doing. The studio left us alone. At the time, Activision was the gold standard in videogames, and we were trusted to make the best game possible."

That being said, no amount of trust between Columbia Pictures and Activision made the limited development time (allegedly six weeks) any less frantic. "I don't remember how many weeks were available, but it was insane," Crane ponders. "In the game business, when you have to work 16-hour days you simply do so. It was worse because I was about to get married and run off on a honeymoon, and the game had to be finished the night before my wedding. If you believe that is it bad luck to see the bride before the wedding, schedule a game deadline at that time and it won't be a problem."

■■■ HISTORY HAS IT that Crane made it to his own wedding without incident, and although we have no idea who qualified as best man, Adam Bellin deserves credit for keeping Crane sane. "In the last few weeks of the project, a young programmer named Adam Bellin was brought on board to help," Crane explains. "His role was primarily to back me up once I left. He took a crash course on how my code worked and stepped in to write some modules. As of the night I checked out, it was all on him to fix bugs, etc. He must've done a good job."

Concrete sales figures for Commodore 64 games are hard to come by, but considering the Atari 2600 port of *Ghostbusters* sold approximately 450,000 copies, it's fair to say that it was successful both critically and commercially. Even so, Crane still wonders what might've been. "*Car Wars* would've been ahead of its time with many innovative features," Crane muses. "Making *Ghostbusters* was fun, but I've always felt some regret when I think about all the things I could've done with *Car Wars* given a reasonable schedule. There is little doubt in my mind that *Car Wars* would've been the better game."

One thing that wouldn't have made it into *Car Wars* was the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. This iconic creature started showing up once the city's PK Energy rating exceeded 5000, and the only way to stop him from destroying a city block was with a well-timed Ghost Bait. "The Stay Puft Marshmallow Man was cool so he had to make it into the game," Crane enthuses. "He took up valuable resources but making him a boss and using him as the basis for a little bit of new gameplay helped justify the effort."

ACTIVISION WAS THE GOLD STANDARD IN VIDEOGAMES, AND WE WERE TRUSTED TO MAKE THE BEST GAME

The Michelin Man's less traction-conscious cousin also functioned as the game's final boss, although the challenge was no greater than timing a run between his legs as he hopped back and forth. "Victory scenes have always been a problem with limited game systems," Crane contemplates. "All resources, including disk space, RAM, schedule and staffing were constantly shuffled around. We were

BANK ROLLING

■ Curiously, the aim of the game is less about rescuing the city from paranormal invasion and more about paying back the $10,000 you have to borrow to start up your own ghost-busting business – hardly the journey of heroism Venkman, Stantz, Spengler and Zeddemore endure during the movie. If you make it to the finale without being at least $10,000 in profit, the game will end and you won't get an opportunity to close the portal. The trick is to capture as many ghosts as you can while paying close attention to the Marshmallow Man's whereabouts on the map, and if you finish the game in profit, you'll receive a code that can be used to start again with more money. Entering no name and an account number of 458, for instance, will start you off with a whopping $1,000,000.



WHAT THEY SAID...



There are few programs more pure fun to play than this one. It substitutes the excitement of living the movie for the ego boost of surmounting a truly demanding challenge.

Electronic Games March 1985

always reluctant to put too many resources into something only seen once, opting instead to dedicate resources to the gameplay. A similar issue would be a big explosion when you crash your ship. Why dedicate a lot of resources to something that you only see when you do something bad?"

It's a question that feels out of time when applied to modern development studios, the kind that invest untold funds and hours into a single set-piece that might only be experienced once per play-through, but looking back at the era when *Ghostbusters* was made, this uncompromising attitude towards gameplay first and foremost is what made sure that Activision's first film tie-in didn't become the next *E.T.* disaster. But now that three full decades have passed since the game's release, are there any secrets that Crane has kept close to his chest after all these years?

"The only thing that comes to mind is how the Gatekeeper and Key Master perform a random turn at each intersection," Crane reveals. "Theoretically, if the random numbers line up they could both reach the temple block shortly into the game and trigger the end game. I locked them out of doing so for some minimum amount of time, after which they could go in. So the length of the game varied randomly beyond that minimum. It was not common for a game to have a defined ending point." But to also have that ending point occur at a random time was pretty much unheard of.

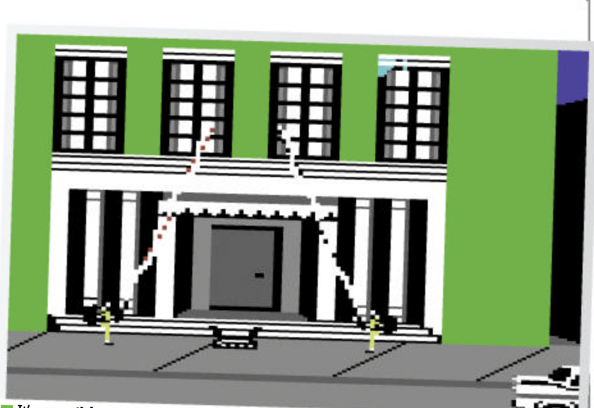
No retrospective on the original *Ghostbusters* would be complete without some mention of the karaoke feature. It busted out the titular song through the Commodore 64's humble SID chip while scrolling through all the lyrics. "Once I had the idea, I felt it had to be implemented," Crane reflects. "I'd developed speech for the Commodore 64, Russell Lieblich [musician and former Activision designer] made a great arrangement of the theme music and Hilary Mills [former Activision senior artist] did a great logo. Those were all so good that I felt they needed to be accompanied by a follow-the-bouncing-ball sing-along."

Most developers would've called it a day at this point but Crane found the time to expand this bonus feature into a makeshift mini-game. "I enlisted the aid of Garry Kitchen and his group at Activision's Eastern Design Centre to program the bouncing ball and scrolling lyrics," Crane explains. "I stole a bit of time away from the game programming to implement the 'Ghostbusters!' yell. That's how the title screen became a playable feature in the game. And before you ask, no, I don't remember who did the yelling."

The spoken speech was limited to just a couple of phrases, the most memorable of which was "He

ONCE I HAD THE IDEA, I FELT IT HAD TO BE IMPLEMENTED

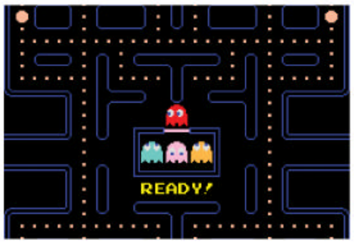
slimed me!" whenever a bust went bad. Crane would push the speech capabilities of the Commodore 64 even further with *Transformers: The Battle To Save The Earth* in 1986, but not before *Ghostbusters* was ported to other home computing platforms. "I was almost never involved in ports," Crane confesses. "I was off making the next original game concept. When porting, a programmer can use the original game as a perfect specification, and they can find the answer to any gameplay question by simply playing the game."



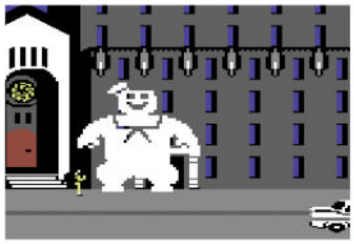
■ It's possible to pincer a ghost between the streams but it's easier just to push them towards the middle of the screen before triggering the trap.

■■■ LOOKING AT THE ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, MSX and Atari 2600 versions of *Ghostbusters* – all of which were released between 1984 and 1985 – it's clear that the ports were handled with a reasonable degree of care. They contained most of the original

> A GAMING EVOLUTION Pac-Man > Ghostbusters > Project Zero



As far as ghosts go, they don't get much more old-school than Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde in the original Pac-Man.



The Marshmallow Man may be a tad creepy, but he's got nothing on the ethereal nightmares in *Project Zero.*



game's features and did a solid job of recreating its presentation. But when *Ghostbusters* was ported to the Master System and NES in 1987 and 1988 respectively, little effort was made to enhance the game beyond some ill-conceived shooting sections. This is especially true of the woeful NES version that received a well-deserved grilling at the hands of The Angry Video Game Nerd back in 2007.

The fact that the NES version was handled so poorly is further testament to what Crane achieved on the Commodore 64. "The Commodore 64 was certainly more capable than the Atari 2600, but it still had limited capabilities," Crane stresses. "The best games were designed to work with the limitations. Enter the movie. It pre-exists with certain expectations. It has characters and storylines that make it what it is. The tendency is to design a game that follows the movie without considering the console's limitations. That's a failure waiting to happen."

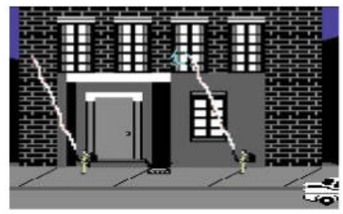
Hardware limitations became much less of a problem once the industry pushed past the 8-bit generation and delivered everything from *Dune* on the Amiga and *Blade Runner* on the PC to *The Warriors* and *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* on more modern systems. And yet, film adaptations and tie-ins still account for some of the worst games. "It's far better to step back and design an original game that takes place in the same universe as the movie," Crane states. "You can sprinkle in iconic imagery or props from the movie, but you're designing a game that should be fun to play whether it's a movie tie-in or not."

As far as design methodologies go, it almost sounds like Crane is stating the obvious. But when you look back to the other tie-ins that were released around the same time, there are few instances where the developer put the game before the licence. *Ghostbusters* may've been cannibalised from a vehicular combat game with a novel yet seemingly ill-suited economy system, but by focusing on the concept of the film rather than trying to turn the game into an interactive script, it succeed in doing what so few tie-ins accomplish. It complemented the film and it held up as a game when you looked past the iconic logo.

Following his time at Activision, Crane went on to work at Hasbro Entertainment and co-founded both Absolute Entertainment and Skyworks Technologies. Today he works as an independent game developer, and if he had the opportunity to work on another *Ghostbusters* game, he'd still stick to his principles. "The approach wouldn't change," Crane confirms. "I'd design a game that was fun to play that just happened to involve some aspects of the movie." In the end, that was the secret to a compelling *Ghostbusters* game.



The only time you can buy upgrades is at the start of the game.



Without the aid of the Image Intensifier, the wandering Slimers are harder to spot.



Faster vehicles shorten the time it takes to travel on the road.



The ending sequence feels rushed when compared to the rest of the game.

GAME CHANGERS

THE SIMS

Released: 31 March, 2000 **Publisher:** EA **Developer:** Maxis **System:** PC

EA originally only planned to sell 160,000 units of *The Sims* – it actually sold 100 times more than that: 16 million units.



Who'd have thought that a simulation based on your mundane duties in real life could be so fun? Well, EA and Maxis, it turns out. The Sims became one of the biggest PC games ever made…

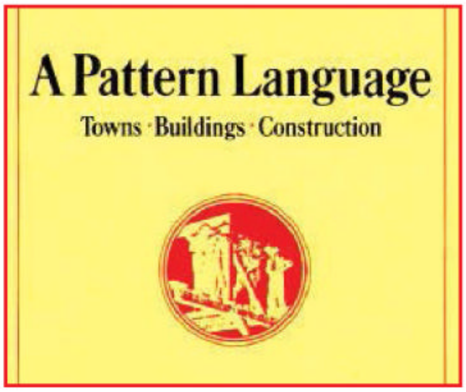
WHAT WOULD YOU do if your house burnt down – if all your possessions were taken away and you had to rebuild your life? For designer Will Wright, the answer to that question was simple: make a game out of it.

After the Oakland firestorm of 1991 destroyed all of Wright's possessions, the designer was inspired to create a virtual dollhouse to try and share his experience with the world.

A year later, Wright – who had previously worked on *SimCity*, *SimEarth* and *SimAnt* – pitched the idea of an architectural design game (then called *Home Tactics*) to Maxis, a company he co-founded, but the board of directors wasn't wholly enthused by the idea. Yet when EA bought out the studio in 1997, Wright's daydream got a second chance. EA wanted to rebrand the game to fit in with Wright's already-successful brand and work on the product could start.

THE ANATOMY OF THE SIMS

YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT THE RIDICULOUSLY IN-DEPTH LITERATURE AND THEORY THAT WENT INTO MAKING THE SYSTEMS THE SIMS RUNS ON…



A PATTERN LANGUAGE

★ Written in 1977, this book outlines the importance of people's own designs on the spaces they inhabit: houses, communities and so on. Wright included many of the principles in *The Sims*' world-building tools.



ABRAHAM MASLOW

★ The American psychologist is famous for thinking up the 'hierarchy of needs'; a pyramid-based system that leads to self-actualisation. Wright applied this model to his Sims' morale and happiness systems.



MAPS OF THE MIND

★ Charles Hampden-Turner's *Maps Of The Mind* charts and conceptualises the mind and its processes in a flowchart-like way, and was the foundation for the artificial intelligence that powers the Sims.

From such personal and humble beginnings grew a giant – one of the first truly mainstream games of the new millennium. *The Sims* was massive – it would run on most families' home computers, it had universal appeal, and nothing quite like it had ever existed at the time. It was peculiar – when Wright first pitched the game, the Maxis board claimed 'no-one wanted to play with a virtual doll's house […] because that was for girls, and girls don't play games'. EA had more foresight than that, though, and it's thanks to *The Sims* that a lot of younger players in the Noughties, both male and female, had their first experience with videogames.

According to EA's figures, female players make up approximately 60 per cent of *The Sims*' playerbase. While its immediate impact wasn't necessarily felt, we'd like to hope it woke up many in the industry to the fact that women were actually playing their games, as much as they may have ignored them.

■ ■ ■ THE REASON *THE Sims* became so popular – and got so very quickly – comes down to three core design tenets; first, the game is practically unwinnable – there are no conditions for victory, no goal can really be achieved. As such, *The Sims* enjoys practically infinite replay value – it's a game about keeping your Sims on the right track, interfering with lite-AI elements and, basically, playing God.

Second, the game includes an advanced architecture system – thanks to its original shape as *Home Tactics* – and can be used as an educational tool. There are people on the **games**™ team that actually went on to read architecture at University thanks to initial exposure to architectural theory in its simplest form in *The Sims*. The game managed to make learning fun for kids – something that you can't really put a price on.

Third, the game became a psychological phenomenon; various sects of players began to evolve from the initial playerbase. A hardcore audience grew almost instantly, forming a very strong community that's still alive and well today, while other players discovered darker sides to themselves and ended up enacting sadistic and violent acts upon their own creations.

Because of how simply the diametrically presented in-game assets looked and handled and interacted with the 3D models of *The Sims* themselves, people began to project their own lives into their avatars. At its core, whether you torture the little guys or not, *The Sims* is wish fulfilment, and it's presented in such an interactive way that we can create entire narratives – establish entire universes – within the toolbox Maxis gives us. Combined with a gentle visual experience and the soft 'Simlish' muzak that played constantly, *The Sims* was seen as a therapeutic tool as much as it was a videogame.

KEY FACTS

■ Two years after its original release, *The Sims* had sold over 11.3 million copies worldwide, easily surpassing the best-selling PC game ever at that point, *Myst*.

■ *The Sims* licence was picked up by Hollywood in 2007, but script issues have prevented any actual progress on a cinematic adaptation of it.

■ Lead designer of *The Sims*, Will Wright, was a *Robot Wars* champion and is an active space-flight enthusiast.

■ Prior to approval, some at Maxis apparently referred to it as 'The Toilet Game'.

THE GAME IS PRACTICALLY UNWINNABLE… AS SUCH, THE SIMS ENJOYS INFINITE REPLAY VALUE



GAME CHANGERS

8 MORE GAMES TO INSPIRE YOUR INNER SADIST

THE SIMS MAY HAVE BEEN MADE WITH DOLLHOUSE RELAXATION IN MIND, BUT BURNING, DROWNING AND MURDERING SIMS WAS A COMMON PASTIME. IT MADE US THINK ABOUT ALL THOSE OTHER TIMES WE'VE BEEN TRULY AWFUL TO OUR CHARACTERS…



SHOOTING NATALYA IN GOLDENEYE

NATALYA IS AN infuriating nuisance in Rare's game-changing shooter. She gets in the way of your rather dangerous gunfire, or finds it *hilarious* to stand in doorways and block you off. On the upside, she's a true bullet sponge. How many times can you shoot her before it's game over? For us, testing her durability became a large part of the game.



SLAPPING WOLVERINE

DEADPOOL IS ALL about chaos, and it's the most realised when you crash the X-Men's airship, rendering the rest of the cast unconscious. There's an achievement for slapping Wolverine 50 times, but we must have continued for a good half hour, laughing at the nonsense Deadpool spouted on each hit. "That's for being so ugly. That's for being so beautiful. That's because *I felt like it*."



MISLEADING MUDOKONS

■ IN THE ORIGINAL *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*, we were appalled to find ourselves directing fellow Mudokons into meat grinders, into mines, or into bottomless pits. Once we 'accidentally' electrocuted one of the meat puppets to death, we knew we couldn't get the good ending, so we had fun using the fools as meat shields… the usual.



FEEDING LARA TO THE WOLVES

■ THE POINT OF the 2013 *Tomb Raider* reboot, we're sure, was for us to empathise with Lara. The intention wouldn't have been for us to find everything that can kill Lara, just to see what it does. 'Will I die if I leap off this cliff?' Yes. 'Will this suspicious trip-wire cause something to crush me?' Yes. 'Will this wolf tear off my face?' Oh yes.



SACRIFICING YOUR SPOUSE

■ THE CENTRE POINT of this *Fable II* temple is a giant device titled The Wheel Of Unholy Misfortune – a torture machine you could use to sacrifice civilians in order to curry favour with the dark lord. Kill enough people and you can collect the most powerful weapon in the game… but only if you offer up our husband or wife first.



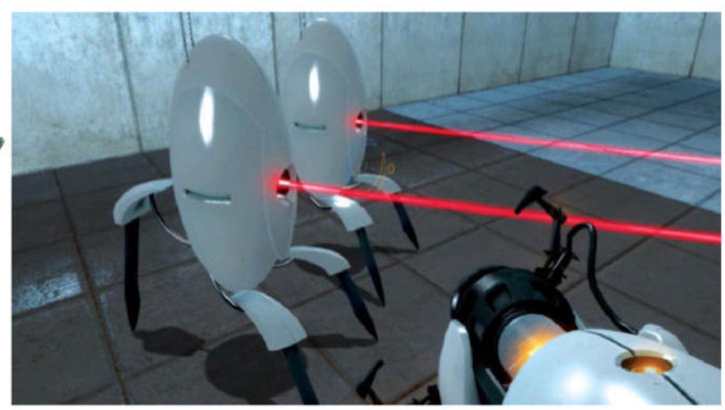
PUTTING DOWN THE SURVIVORS

■ *DEAD RISING 2* had two primary objectives – find a cure for your daughter and rescue a slew of abandoned survivors. Thing is, those survivors are whiny idiots – some don't get on, some wander off, and they're universally dumb. We enjoying feeding them to the zombies, using them as bait so we could get further into the city complex.



HARVESTING LITTLE GIRLS FOR DRUGS

■ WE NEVER THOUGHT we'd write that headline. But thanks to Ken Levine and *BioShock*, here we are. We assume Levine wanted players to avoid harvesting the kids for precious Adam, but we're pragmatists – we knew harvesting would provide us with more of the magical juice, and what's one girl's life when compared to, let's say, having bees living in your arms?



PLAYING TURRETS OFF

■ WE NEVER THOUGHT it was possible to have an emotional attachment to a turret, but Valve humanised the automated killing machines and made them adorable. That didn't stop us setting the things to attack each other, though, laughing at their cutesy death cries and empty threats. When we dropped one on top of another, destroying them both… that's when we were thinking with portals.





INTERVIEW TIM SCHAFER

Double Fine's attention is focused on its new point-and-click adventure Broken Age, but ten years ago it was Psychonauts that was blowing minds…

Tim Schafer has one of gaming's most enviable CVs. Most developers would be happy having created the *The Secret of Monkey Island* but Tim can also note *Full Throttle*, *Day Of The Tentacle* and *Grim Fandango* among his incredible successes. In 2005, he added *Psychonauts* to the list, cramming new concepts into a finely honed and polished platform game collect-em-up that used psychic abilities to enter the minds of enemies in order to battle against their inner demons and fears. Dumped by Microsoft before it was released, it nevertheless remains one of Tim's most overlooked gems. Here, on the 10th anniversary of its release – and in the same month as Double Fine's new point-and-click adventure *Broken Age* is released – Tim tells us more about this sterling piece of work.

So you left LucasArts in 2000 to create Double Fine Productions.

I almost can't take credit for the idea of leaving LucasArts. Friends of mine there did a napkin map and said we should leave and make PS2 games because we could make a lot of money. I was kind of wary. I didn't want to leave because I had a sweet gig there. A lot of things were taken care of and I only had to worry about the games and making them as good as possible.

How did *Psychonauts* come about?

Psychonauts was a mutation of ideas. Some of the themes and the concepts had been in early game pitches I made at LucasArts. The idea of dreams went as far back as *Full Throttle*. I always wanted to work with interactive dreams and visions and I was interested in the idea that there are things in your head that you do not consciously know. But it's funny because someone walked into the office and said, "Tell me about that thing when you go into other people's heads", and I was like, "No, no, it is going deep into your *own* head". And I thought 'Wait, that's better; that's totally better'. Someone's misunderstanding of an early pitch helped me come up with this idea of *Psychonauts*.

Were you excited about going it alone?

We started with three people figuring out how the fax machine worked and fixed the plumbing; the basic stuff that seems romantic when you are starting out a company and you're in a warehouse and there's no heat and it's awesome. It doesn't seem that romantic when you are at crunch, though.

> **AT FIRST I WAS TRYING TO GO WITH A CHARLIE BROWN KIND OF THING WITH REAL KIDS**

Did you prefer being in control?

LucasArts was a great place to work, with tons of super talented people. It was a unique company with an amazing ranch and we got so much attention so it was a safe place to be. But it had to make *Star Wars* games and make money for George. I wanted to work on original projects and control how the team was treated.

Why did *Psychonauts* take five years?

You know the saying that bumblebees shouldn't technically be able to fly if you look at



REMAKING THE ORIGINAL

"I WOULD LIKE to remake *Psychonauts* in HD but most of the original files are lost. People have had them on their machines and not checked them in. We've had people leave and their hard drives have crashed. We'd have to reanimate a lot of stuff from scratch and it would be really expensive – more than a million dollars. If we were going to do that, we think we should just make another game."



The locations were truly mind-bending, with Raz expected to battle against some bizarre enemies such as the brain-powered Blueprint Brain Tank in the Brain Tumbler Experiment.

the aerodynamics or the weight of them? If you told that to bumblebees, they'd drop to the ground simultaneously. The same was true of us. If we knew of the obstacles in the way of making *Psychonauts*, we probably wouldn't have summoned the gusto to do it. It was the first time we had made a platform game and we had junior people working on their first game. We were working with a publisher – Microsoft – that had just launched the Xbox. We were feeling this thing out.

Why make a platform game; wouldn't it have been easier to stick with what you knew?
I was inspired by 3D platform games. I liked the 3D environments of them, exploring and swimming and having fun. But I felt they were missing the depth of adventure games so I wanted to do something that felt submersive but had unusual settings and non-typical characters and a deep storyline.



How did you develop the characters?
I was trying to write a document about the various kids you see at Summer Camp, looking at their personalities, what they believed in, what their parents were like and that kind of thing. I was spending a lot of time on the social network Friendster – on which I actually met my wife – and I was like, wait a second, I'm going to make fake Friendster profiles for all of these camp kids. It helped me decide who was friends with who, what they might post on each other's walls and what pictures they may put up to represent themselves. It was really helpful.

Are back stories important?
I am a big believer in them and that's the secret I think to making characters that really stand out. But I believe in not sharing those back stories by laying them around a world in the form of books. I wanted the characters to reveal little bits and pieces of a back story as they talk.

Why have *Psychonauts*' lead character Raz run away from the circus to sneak into a summer camp packed with youngsters with psychic abilities?
I wanted to make a game about childhood where players could explore secret areas and I think wandering around the woods is something a lot of kids have fond memories of. It's timeless and doesn't age.

Was that a hallmark of your own childhood?
I remember being ten years old and exploring areas where I knew I shouldn't be. At our camp there was a bordering edge of barbed wire fence that you couldn't get over and there was a cabin down there. We'd say it was where Hatchet Mary lived – someone who hacked your parents apart – and we'd dare each other to go down there. It's an excitement about going where you are not supposed to go and crossing a line. It was something we tried to capture in the summer camp of *Psychonauts*.

***Psychonauts* drew on your past adventure games as well, though, didn't it?**
We had dialogue trees, an inventory and straight-up puzzles. It was how I knew how to make a game. But I also drew on life, so we had paranoid milkmen and bacon and stuff like that. The idea for bacon came from a story someone told me about getting rid of tapeworm. If there is a worm in your stomach or your intestines and – sorry, this is gross – you hold a piece a bacon in front of your open mouth and the smell of the bacon will get to the worm. You'll see its head popping up at the back of your throat so you grab it and pull it out. I thought it was so funny that bacon is so delicious that even a tape worm can't resist it. Ford Cruller couldn't resist it either.

THE LONG GAME

> "IT WAS ALWAYS a bummer to see *Psychonauts* in the list of the top five games that you didn't play. It was seen as a flop but in the early days it sold 400,000 and on digital distribution it kept selling. When we got the rights back, we put it on Steam and included achievements. It started to sell again. It's not a game that nobody played but it's one that needed the longevity that digital distribution could provide."

A stand-out part of the game was the excellent voice acting by Richard Horowitz, who played Raz. Why choose him?
At first I was trying to go with a Charlie Brown kind of thing with real kids. We had some come in and read out some lines but they didn't have the right acting experience. With Richard we could say, "Okay, can you do it again but a bit faster because you don't know the bad guys is bad yet?" and he would say "Gotcha", and do it about eight different ways. Some little kids can't change their performance and often just read it the same way again. Yet Richard had this hilarious audition tape. He's one of those guys who is always changing his voice, like Robin Williams. It was great to have him.



One of *Psychonauts*' major strengths was its vibrant characterisation. Here we see Jasper Rolls, the inner critic of insane actress Gloria Von Gouton.



And the soundtrack was the fine work of Peter McConnell, who you had worked with for years…
He worked on *Money 2* and *Day Of The Tentacle* – he wrote the theme for that. We called him in for *Psychonauts* and he did an amazing job. He has also been involved with *Broken Age*.

You have said before that *Psychonauts* came out at the wrong time, when the market had changed. Do you stick with that?
Yes, it was very near the end of the Xbox life cycle. The reason it got cancelled at Microsoft was because they were not going to fund any more Xbox games from the start of 2005 because they were bringing out the Xbox 360. We came out in February that year. I was like, "We're two months, just two months over that year" but it was just a little too late.

Was that a stressful time?
We had the company riding on it. It was our only game and to think it could all come crashing down would have been a waste. Nobody would have seen it. It would have just disappeared and I would have retired from games. It would have been devastating.

Did you really think of quitting?
No. [laughs] When I get on track with something, I see it through. I made that game and I put so much into it that I would not have accepted any possibility of not finishing it. It's like with *Broken Age*. Three years in the making and I'm sure some people thought that we had stopped working on it but no, we're just about done.

Was it touch and go?
We were so close to the end of our money. I made an announcement to the company at one point that we were shutting down and that Wednesday's pay check would be the last one. Then two weeks of money came in from a random source and we signed with Majesco so it worked out. When you are really dependent on a publisher for your future, it can be very dicey.

IF WE KNEW OF THE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY, WE PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT

Looking back on it all, would you have done things differently?
Yeah. We didn't know what we were doing at the time. The fact it was good was because we kept plugging away and learning. The levels took a lot of designing and redesigning and for a long time it wasn't fun to play. It had crazy backgrounds but the character didn't feel right because we hadn't emphasised Raz enough. At some point we got a task force together of people from every discipline to look at Raz and how he felt and played. We looked at how Raz grabbed ladders and tightropes and how he walked and how he stopped walking, how he turned and stuff like that. I think the big lesson was to do that first before you do the rest of the game.

Some dismissed *Psychonauts* as a children's game, didn't they?
Day Of The Tentacle had the same problem. We got a call once from Steven Spielberg who wanted a hint for his son Max. The first thing he said was it was great that we made games for kids. I wanted to say, "Ahh, it's a fun game for kids to play in that it doesn't have bad content in it – except for microwaving your hamster and stuff – but it's not *just* for kids". I've just always been drawn to cartoon-like humour, and stylised artistic visuals. I grew up with *Ren & Stimpy* and Warner Bros cartoons. They always had adult content. I just assumed everyone loved that kind of thing too.

Will you ever make a sequel?
Yes. I think the time has to be right and we have to have access to the right kind of money. It has to live up to the first game.

In 2012, *Minecraft* creator Markus Persson tweeted that he would fund a sequel. What happened there?
It was a nice offer but I think the actual price tag of what it would cost was not what he was expecting. The first game cost $13m, so not exactly cheap. It was an exciting moment and I would still like to do it. But he's probably got plenty of people asking for money.

Are you surprised at the cult following?
Of course not, it's awesome [laughs].

Do you feel vindicated for having made the move, then?
[laughs] Yes. Vindicated. I win. [laughs]

■ *Broken Age Act 2* is Double Fine's latest release, continuing the recent path of making smaller games packed with character.





BEST INTRO

MEGA MAN 2

NES [CAPCOM] **1988**

OFTEN THE MOST memorable openings in videogames are the ones that display the most elaborate visuals, which is why contemporary games are often celebrated loudest – case in point: *BioShock*'s maiden descent into Rapture. But even within the limited capabilities of basic console hardware (in this case the NES) developers found increasingly distinctive ways to create dynamic visual moments for players to marvel at. *Mega Man 2* does just that with only a few lines of text, flawlessly setting the scene for the ensuing experience; the camera sweeps up a skyscraper as the music swells, revealing Mega Man standing proudly atop. It's one of the most rousing moments in the history of gaming, one that can't fail to make gamers ridiculously pumped-up about what lies ahead. As far as heroic entrances go, all other videogame icons should take note.





BEHIND THE SCENES

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

It's been 20 years since British studio Rare rebooted one of Nintendo's first mascots, giving us the ideal excuse to uncover the history of this smashing SNES title



Rare's purpose-built HQ was funded off the back of *Donkey Kong Country*'s success.



Released: 1994
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Key Staff: Gregg Mayles (Designer), Tim Stamper (Producer), Chris Sutherland (Lead Programmer), Brendan Gunn (Programmer), David Wise (Music)

PRETTY MUCH EVERY game development studio of note has a title in its back catalogue that can be seen as a pivotal point in its evolution and growth. Valve has *Half Life*, id Software has *Doom*, and Square has *Final Fantasy*; these games provided the momentum that has propelled such esteemed companies to global stardom, and without these significant successes, it's highly plausible that such famous code houses might not even exist today. UK-based Rare is no exception to this rule. While the firm wasn't in any danger of falling into obscurity during the early Nineties, it's hard to imagine that it would have become quite as big as it is today without the propulsion provided by the 1994 SNES smash-hit *Donkey Kong Country*.

Today, Rare is a wholly owned subsidiary of Microsoft Game Studios and operates out of a purpose-built, high-tech HQ in the idyllic Leicestershire countryside, but prior to reviving the *Donkey Kong* brand, it was based in the rather less-modern surroundings of a Grade II listed farmhouse, just a few miles up the road from its current residence. Despite the lack of swanky offices, it was just as fascinating a place to work as legend might have you believe. "Rare was an amazing place back then," recalls Brendan Gunn, who was employed as a technical programmer on *Donkey Kong Country* and had previously worked on the NES classic *Captain Skyhawk*. "It was quite a small company with a real family feel. Games were created in a very organic way, not planned out in detail in advance. We were always free to just try out ideas. Whatever worked would stay, and if it didn't feel good, we just ripped it back out again. In those days, it was not uncommon for entire games to be shelved if they didn't show enough promise. I think this was key to keeping the quality high."



Following a string of commercial successes during the late Eighties and early Nineties, the Stampers faced an uncertain future – as did the industry in general. The next generation of systems had started to arrive in the form of the 3DO, Amiga CD32 and Philips CD-i, but owners of existing 16-bit consoles seemed curiously reticent to upgrade, thanks largely to the unproven nature of CD-ROM systems and the high cost of new hardware. Sensing that the current generation still had some life in it but simultaneously mindful of an exciting new era just around the corner, the Stampers began to invest heavily in new graphics tech with the ultimate aim of creating one of the most advanced code houses in the British Isles.

It was a risky strategy, which involved great expense and temporarily limited the development output of the studio, but it was one that ultimately paid off; encouraged by the work being undertaken in Twycross, publishing partner Nintendo decided it was time to invest in the firm and promptly purchased 49 per cent of the company. "Rare began experimenting with creating 3D-rendered characters with our expensive new Silicon Graphics computers," Gunn explains, likening the situation to a perfect storm of events. "Visitors from Nintendo were suitably impressed by what we were working on, and Rare became a second-party developer. Rare had already impressed Nintendo with some excellent games, several of which Nintendo had actually published themselves. The obvious potential of pre-rendered 3D graphics would have sealed the deal, especially as the SNES was nearing the end of its life, and Nintendo was a little behind the competition in developing the next generation of 3D-capable consoles."

WHATEVER WORKED WOULD STAY, AND IF IT DIDN'T FEEL GOOD, WE JUST RIPPED IT BACK OUT AGAIN

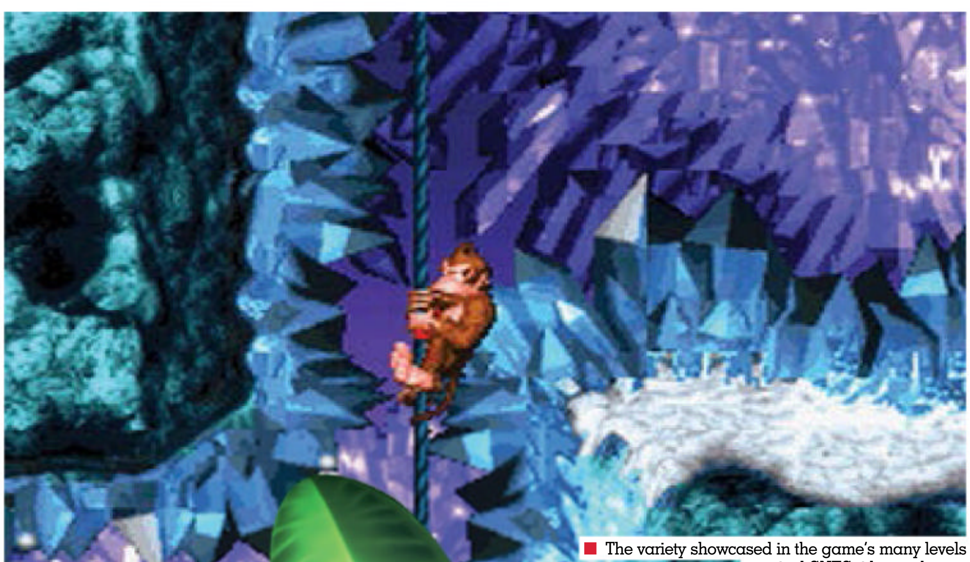
NINTENDO'S EXECS WERE so taken with what Rare had achieved with its shiny-new Silicon Graphics workstations that it effectively opened up its vault of properties and allowed the British company to take its pick – within reason, of course. "At this point, the door was open for the Stampers to push for the use of some existing Nintendo IP," Gunn says. "Obviously, they wouldn't give us a treasured character like Mario, but Donkey Kong had been largely abandoned for some time, and this was a chance to give him a new burst of life." Indeed, save for a few cameo roles, the mighty Kong had been largely dormant for the best part of a decade; his last outing was 1983's *Donkey Kong 3*. Ironically, during 1994 another Kong game would hit the market in shape of the Game Boy title *Donkey Kong '94* (see "1994's Other Kong"), but it was more of a retooling of the 1981 original than an entirely new

1994'S OTHER KONG

With two Kongs around, 1994 marked the battle of the apes



WHILE RARE MANAGED to kick-start Kong's career with *Donkey Kong Country* and turn the massive, bumbling primate into a household name once again, it wasn't the only title he starred in during the bumper year of 1994. June (September in Europe) saw the launch of an all-new Donkey Kong adventure on the monochrome Game Boy system that is often referred to as *Donkey Kong '94*. Based loosely on the original 1981 arcade machine that started it all, it begins with the coin-op's first four levels, but quickly changes pace with 97 all-new stages that take the core gameplay seen in Kong's debut and turn it on its head with all manner of enhancements and improvements. Our hero Mario (who reverts back to his not-so-Super guise for this release) can swim, climb ropes and even catch incoming barrels, and there are boss fights to contend with as well. While the arcade game was a score-based venture, this portable outing is blessed with a battery back-up facility so that players can retain their progress. All things considered, *Donkey Kong '94* is a fantastic update to the coin-guzzling original and rightly received critical acclaim on its release; however, hitting the market in the same year as Rare's legendary title perhaps dented its chances of long-lasting fame, and it has been rather overshadowed in the years that have followed. Thankfully, it hasn't been totally forgotten and is currently available on the 3DS Virtual Console, where it is well-worth investigating. One final point of interest is that Kong is wearing a red tie in this title, an item of clothing that Rare would factor into its own interpretation of the famous character – an interpretation that, it should be pointed out, has become the accepted norm on this infamous character since the launch of *Donkey Kong Country*.



The variety showcased in the game's many levels put rival SNES titles to shame.

adventure, and its release did little to detract from Rare's grand vision.

Gunn's role on *Donkey Kong Country* was a technical one, and he had to come up with the code that would make everything sing. His contribution was an incredibly important one, but even so, he was unprepared for the first time that he laid eyes on Rare's fresh interpretation of gaming's most famous ape. "I was really amazed the first time I saw a 3D-rendered Donkey Kong model on screen," he recalls more than twenty years later. "It looked so different from traditional hand-drawn graphics, and far ahead of what consoles would be able to render in real-time for many years to come. It was very exciting and inspiring to work with these graphics. All my previous games had been solo projects in terms of programming, so *Donkey Kong Country* was different in that I could spend all of my time focused on the visuals, leaving the gameplay to Chris Sutherland. For me, that was a bigger difference than the pre-rendering. I was able to put a lot of time into really optimising the use of video RAM to get a lot of variation in the graphics. We didn't want it to look like there was a lot of repeated images on screen. I also spent a lot of time adding lots of layers of parallax in the backgrounds, and adding the day-to-night transitions and weather effects."

Those familiar with the geography of the English Midlands will be aware that Rare's HQ isn't the only thing that the small and rather sleepy village of Twycross is famous for – it also boasts an internationally renowned zoo, which houses the largest selection of monkeys and apes in the western hemisphere, making it the ideal research target for a game studio creating a title showcasing plenty of hairy primates. That's what you'd assume at least, but sadly the trip that occurred during the creation of *Donkey Kong Country* would prove to be a waste of effort. "I was not involved in the zoo visit, but I understand it was ultimately fruitless," Gunn smiles. "The animators tried making Donkey Kong move like a real ape, but it just didn't look right in the game and he finished up moving more like a galloping horse."

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY was designed from the ground up to be a ground-breaking visual spectacle, but like so many titles of the period, it took inspiration from one of the oldest SNES games: *Super Mario World*. Kong is able to jump onto the heads of enemies – just like Mario – and collects bananas instead of coins; he also traverses a massive overworld map and is able to move freely between stages using connected pathways – something that was popularised by the *Super Mario* series. To call this slavish cloning might be a little overzealous, but few would deny the fact that Rare's prestigious Nineties output benefited greatly from ideas generated by the Japanese company with which it shared a very intimate relationship. "Rare has made a lot of original games," starts Gunn, "But when it comes to working on familiar genres, we always looked to Nintendo for inspiration. Why not learn from the best? We always tried to put our own spin on things – not simply copying Nintendo's games – but they often found brilliant solutions to



The map screens hold a hidden regret for Gunn, who wishes he'd spent more time on pathways.

WHAT THEY SAID...



With such a strong replay value, *Donkey Kong Country* is sure to be a colossal hit this holiday. If you want to hit an ape ball in the side pocket, you'll recognise *DKC* for what it is: the gorilla of your dreams

GamePro, 1994

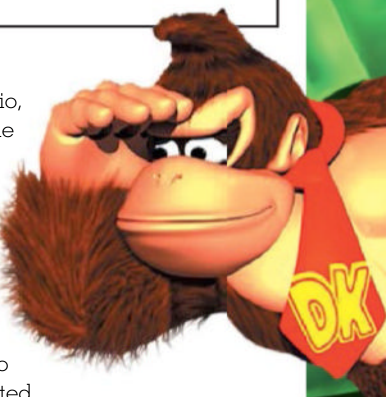
common problems, so it would be foolish not to copy a few ideas."

That's not to say that the team designing the game didn't come up with a few unique notions of their own – one of these being the use of Post It notes to plan out level designs, which resulted in some particularly memorable stages. "We wanted a process that allowed us to visually build up the level plans and also allow fast iteration at the initial design stage," Gregg Mayles tells us. Mayles worked as the main designer on the game and is still employed at Rare today, making him one of the studio's longest-serving staffers. While creating level layouts on paper certainly isn't anything innovative in the games industry, Post Its permitted the designer to switch scenes and change the plan quickly and effortlessly, rather than having to redraw entire portions of the level. "Drawing things on bits of paper that could be shuffled around, reworked or replaced was ideal," continues Mayles – who, like Gunn, is a local lad and was born just a few miles from Rare's Twycross HQ. "Someone suggested these bits of paper could be Post It notes and it all went from there. It was a real revelation at the time and I still use Post Its at the heart of my design process today."

Given that Nintendo was bankrolling the creation of this new title – and that it used one of the company's most famous faces – you might assume that the Japanese veteran was quite hands-on with development. Gunn explains that even if such meetings took place – and only the Stampers really know the truth on the score – the team was kept well away from any distractions that could possibly impact the final product. "We had a great deal of creative freedom," Gunn enthuses. "As an individual, I felt free to try anything that could make the game look better, and as a company, I think Rare was allowed to make *Donkey Kong Country* very much our own product. Tim and Chris would always shield the team as much as possible from outside influences so we could focus on making the games to the best of our abilities. I understand that in the early stages of development, Miyamoto was very keen to exert some control over the look of the Donkey Kong character, as Tim had pushed his design a long way from the original. The final look was a great compromise – and I'm pleased to see that Nintendo hasn't deviated very much since then." Indeed, Donkey Kong today sports a look that is based more on the SNES titles than his previous adventures – an admission by Nintendo that Rare created the most aesthetically pleasing iteration of the great ape.

THE STAMPERS HAVE since left Rare to pursue other projects – it was recently revealed that Tim has founded a smartphone game studio in Nottingham called FortuneFish with his son, Joe – but their impact on *Donkey Kong Country* cannot be understated. "They were a huge influence," says Gunn. "In particular I remember Tim was a great motivator as well as a very talented artist. He would spend a lot of time with me, always pushing me to take things to the next level. For example, just having it rain wasn't enough. It should rain way in the distance first, and then gradually bring it forwards until it's raining in all the layers of the screen." This graphical flourish is one aspect of the game that Gunn is particularly proud of. "My favourite bit is the combination of the weather effects and multi-layered parallaxing. I really enjoyed hearing other engineers trying to figure out how we crammed so much graphical variation in each level. Look at *Super Mario World* for comparison; its a lovely game, but I see so much obvious repetition in the graphics."

DRAWING THINGS ON BITS OF PAPER THAT COULD BE SHUFFLED AROUND WAS IDEAL



Speaking of Mario, it was reported at the time of development that Shigeru Miyamoto was less than impressed with Rare's efforts, allegedly bemoaning the fact that gamers of the time were dazzled by visuals and not gameplay. Miyamoto himself has publicly refuted this stance in recent years – stating quite correctly that as Kong's daddy, he was intimately involved with the production of the title – but could the graphically stunning *Donkey Kong Country* have caused the famous designer to feel a little jealous, given that he was working on the more visually simplistic *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* at the time? "I only really know what's been reported on the internet, and we all know that's the best place in the world for finding opinion rather than fact," laughs Gunn when

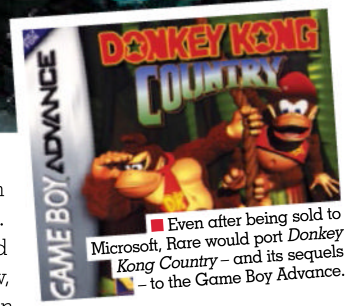


■ Rideable allies was another aspect that was borrowed from *Super Mario World.*



■ Barrels were put to good use in the game, offering everything from a friendly ape to rocket propulsion.





■ Even after being sold to Microsoft, Rare would port *Donkey Kong Country* – and its sequels – to the Game Boy Advance.

WHAT THEY SAID...



Who needs 32 or even 64-bit when Nintendo can keep pulling marvels out of the 16-bit hat? *Donkey Kong Country* is simply mind-blowing

EGM, 1994

asked about Miyamoto's comments. "I know Miyamoto was passionate about the game during development, and so were all the people at Rare, but that doesn't mean we all wanted the same things. Japanese games have some very distinct differences from games in the west, and the brilliant Shigeru Miyamoto has been a big part of the Japanese style. I'm sure he would have made the game very differently, but I'm confident that he must also appreciate some of the qualities that made it stand out from his own games."

Deadlines in videogame development are so often dictated by the purchasing habits of players, and Rare was working to a strict schedule with *Donkey Kong Country* – the game had to hit store shelves during the lucrative holiday season in North America. Gunn admits that the team was able to fulfil its objectives in time for launch, but even so, there are things he would like to have spent more time on. "No project ever really feels complete," he says. "I could always go back and keep improving things, but at some point you just have to draw a line under it and let it out into the world. Having said that, the only thing I'm really unhappy about in *Donkey Kong Country* is in the map pages. We have these beautifully rendered map screens with winding paths linking each area of the game, and I just did a lazy straight line path for Donkey Kong to walk along instead of accurately following the path. I'm a little embarrassed by that."

THANKFULLY THE GENERAL public didn't seem to pay any notice to the lack of winding pathways, and *Donkey Kong Country* became a runaway hit, shifting almost 10 million copies worldwide and effectively delaying the onset of the next-generation revolution; the game assured SNES owners that there was little sense in dropping an insane amount of cash on a 3DO or Jaguar when their current console was capable of producing such amazing visuals. Two SNES-based sequels would follow, and Gunn worked on both – yet he freely admits that he doesn't hold the same level of affection for them as the trailblazing original. "I worked on both of the SNES sequels, as well as *Donkey Kong 64*," he recounts. "Again for the SNES sequels, I was focused on the graphics, and I continued to refine some of the techniques I'd used in the original. I was particularly pleased with the 3D effect inside the flooded ship – I can't even remember whether that was *Donkey Kong Country 2* or *Donkey Kong Country 3*. The dripping honey effect in *Donkey Kong Country 2* was quite satisfying, too. Although the sequels were more polished in a number of ways, I don't look back on them with the same fondness as the original. I just don't really like retreading old ground."

I KNOW MIYAMOTO WAS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE GAME DURING DEVELOPMENT

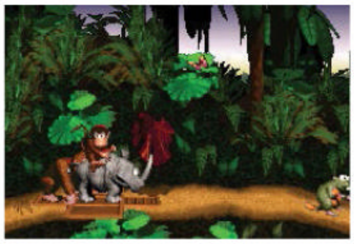
Nevertheless, Gunn's involvement with the *Donkey Kong Country* series would have a dramatic impact on his life thanks to the bonus scheme that Rare operated during his tenure with the company, which ensured that staff benefited from their hard work should their games turn out to be big sellers. Is it fair to say that these releases changed his life? "*Donkey Kong Country* and its sequels were pretty lucrative, but 'life-changing' is perhaps a little strong," he replies

> A GAMING EVOLUTION

Super Mario World > DK Country > Clockwork Knight



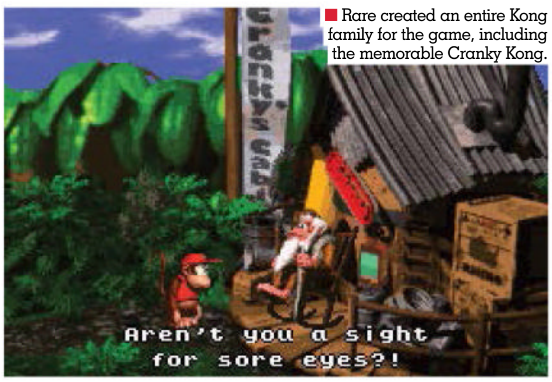
Shigeru Miyamoto's seminal 16-bit smash hit was a massive influence on practically every 2D platformer.



Sega's *Saturn*-based 2D platform epic took the 3D rendered visuals of *Donkey Kong Country* to the next level.



with a chuckle. "I'd definitely say 'life-enhancing'!" Gunn now works outside of the games industry with a design firm in Ashby-de-la-Zouch – a small town just minutes away from Rare's Twycross HQ and the place where Tim and Chris Stamper originally founded the company back in Eighties, under the moniker Ashby Computers & Graphics – and remains very proud of the things he achieved during his time with the studio. "It was great working with so many talented people over so many years, but for me *Donkey Kong Country* was the pinnacle. The best part was working with such an amazing team."



■ Rare created an entire Kong family for the game, including the memorable Cranky Kong.

CONTINUATION OF KONG

The line of Nintendo's infamous ape didn't end with Rare

When Microsoft purchased Rare it drew a line under the studio's involvement with the Donkey Kong character it had done so much to revitalise. However, it thankfully didn't mean the end of the *Donkey Kong Country* series, as in 2010 Nintendo enlisted Texas-based Retro Studios to create *Donkey Kong Country Returns* for the Wii. It was a critical and commercial success and managed to capture much of the magic of the originals – a remarkable achievement when you consider that Rare wasn't involved in its production. The game would be ported to the Nintendo 3DS in 2012 by Monster Games, and Retro would return to the series in 2014 with *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze* on the Wii U.







■ During the game's memorable intro, Kong performs his own dance routine before being caught in a CGI explosion.

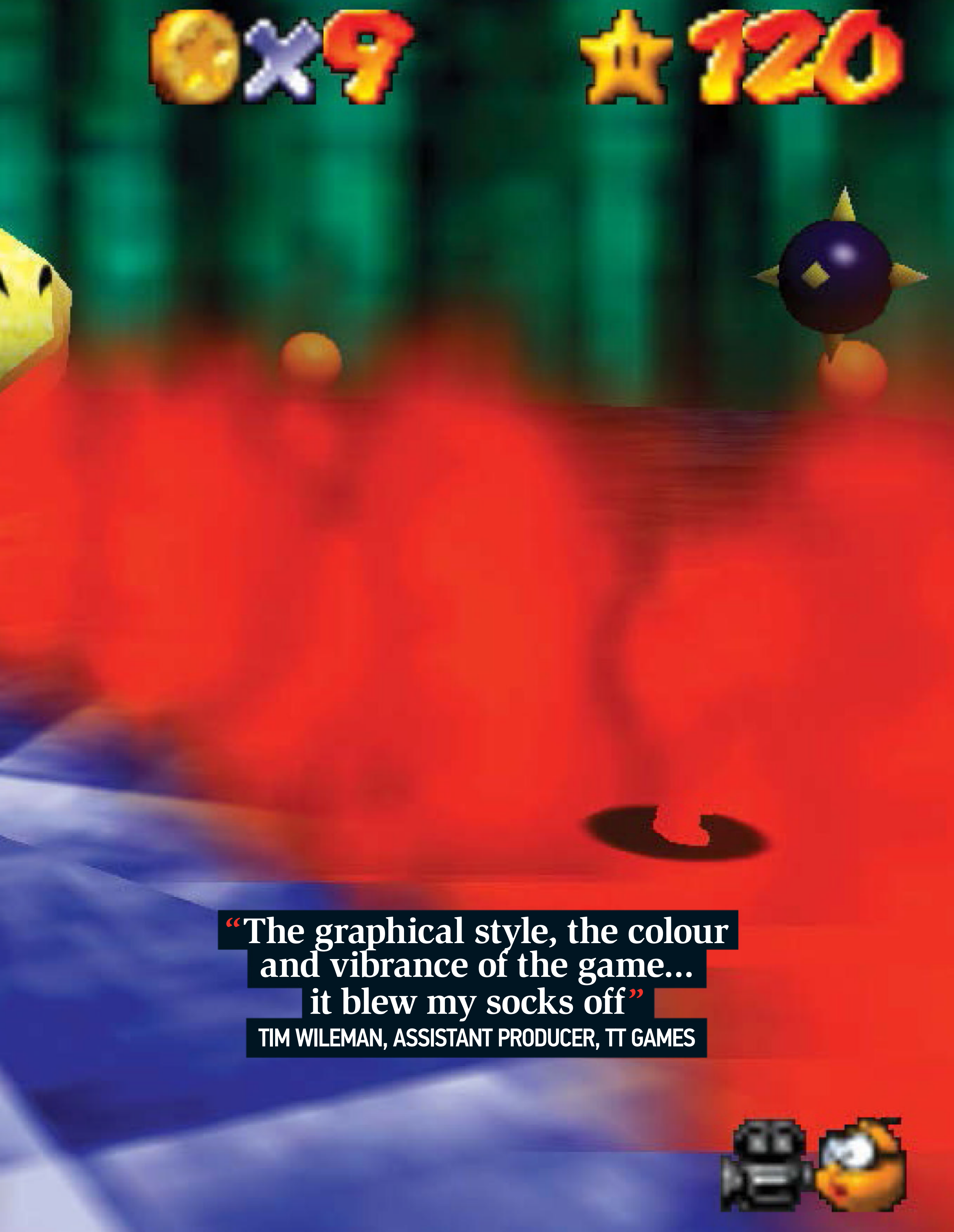
WHY I ♥…

SUPER MARIO 64

TIM WILEMAN, ASSISTANT PRODUCER, TT GAMES

I've been playing games for a number of years now, but one of the games that's inspired me the most… well, I was a young man looking to get a job in the industry, working in a videogames shop and the Nintendo 64 had just come out, and Super Mario 64 *was released. Well, that just changed the world for me to be honest – the graphical style, the colour and vibrance of the game…it blew my socks off. I'll never forget it, you know? Nintendo managed to create this fantastic world and it had so much cool gameplay, so much excitement… it was the transition from 2D to 3D, it was a really special time for games. I know that's kind of clichéd to say now, but there's a reason people say it, you know? Nintendo, at the time, they just really* did *tap into something magical.*





"The graphical style, the colour and vibrance of the game... it blew my socks off"

TIM WILEMAN, ASSISTANT PRODUCER, TT GAMES